



June 20, 2010
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

*Mad Men**
Rev. James Lamkin

1 Kings 19:9-15a; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39

The Bible is a book of biographies; and biographies are chronologies of crises. They are "people stories" whose pivot points always come

- on the horns of a dilemma
- or when backed into a corner
- or when hitting rock bottom
- or when it is darkest just before dawn
- or when what nearly killed them also had the power to heal them.

It's a prodigal son caked in pig pen mud. It's King David grieving, wailing over the palace wall for the death of his son Absalom. It's Mary Magdalene whose life was exorcised of demons, so that she could make room for her own self and God. Biographies are chronologies of crises.

As Pappa Hemingway said it, "Life breaks us all, but some grow strong, some grow strong, at the broken places."

We all have broken places. For some, it's health. Other others, it's faith. For some, it's relationships. And for some of us it is all of the above.

We all have broken places; and church is the place we bring our broken places. and for a lot of reasons. Who we see here. and who we saw here. are two of those. And that God is here and everywhere else.

The Bible with its basketful of biographies of broken folk whom God made strong in the broken places.

On this Father's Day, the texts high-profile two men. Two Mad Men to borrow a title from a TV series about the 60's.

These broken, Mad Men were mended, by God. But maybe the greater miracle is not about their mending, but that we men on this Father's Day, could be as well. Wouldn't that be something?

We find Mad Man number one sulking in the slough of despond, in a cave of depression. What 400 prophets of Baal could not do, one woman named Jezebel did do. With his tail between his legs he burrows, discouraged, into hiding, and accompanied only by his monotone mantra: I alone am left. I alone am left.

Of course, he had seen better days.

Elijah was called by God to go prophesy to Israel, in particular, King Ahab, who had turned his back on God. Ahab had arranged a political marriage with the King of Sidon to marry his daughter, Jezebel. And together they promoted Baal worship in Israel, rather than the worship of Yahweh, the one true God.

Elijah challenged all the priests of Baal to a god grudge match. It was a "no holes barred, winner take all, my God is going to whip your god, by God!" contest.

The challenge was to see who would be the first to swoop down from heaven and with fire consume a soaking wet, bloody altar with a dead bull on it. The winner would be Top God.

Baal and Baal's priests try first and they bomb.

Then Elijah prayed to Yahweh, his God, the only true God. And the flames fall, and the bulls, the blood, the water, the stones, the altar, the whole thing is licked-up by fiery tongue from heaven and sends the false priests running for their lives.

Yahweh is Top God; and God's wing man, the maverick, Elijah shares in the victory.

But biographies are chronologies of crises. From this mountain-top victory, our confident manly-man plummets to the confines of a cave and crashes from self-assurance to self-loathing. From God's wing man to God's lost wanderer.

That journey is echoed in the Gerasene Demoniac, this fellow who lives exiled from the towns people, and lives alone among the tombs. Like Elijah he is broken. If the man in the cave was depressed; then the man in the cemetery is scattered and torn apart and loud. Unlike Thoreau, he is no longer living a life of quiet desperation."

"What's your name," Jesus asks. Remember the guy's answer? "Legion, for we are many." He says. A modern translation may read, "What is your name," asks Jesus? "Multi-tasking," the guy says, "For I am all over the place."

It seems like a long journey from the town to the tombs; from the mountain top to cave. But it is not, is it?

For we have all made, and will make again, that journey.

Like Elijah, every man, every father has done, and will need to do again, some cave time and some of what we do in there is "cave in." Time to think and to hide and to be cornered by God. God is an accomplished spelunker.

I figure that's why there are so many cave drawings. Before PowerPoint, before flip-charts, before spreadsheets, sticky-notes, project management, team meetings, flow charts, Gant charts, Myers-Briggs, and vision re-visioning off-site retreats their were guys drawing on cave walls with their own blood trying to mind-map what they were up-against in life. It may have been a

herd of Woolly Mammoths in the valley. Or maybe a competitive company down the street, or on the other side of the world, that sells a few more widgets faster than we do.

Sometimes life just "caves in." and the "daily game face ritual" which has served us so well for so many years can no longer mask a haunting insecurity. And memories of the Glory Days, of which Boss Springsteen reminds us, fade.

And then there's fatherhood! If it is difficult to measure success as a businessman, how much more difficult is it to do so as a father? And there is plenty afoot these days to undermine every parent's confidence.

But God has a knack for spelunking. God comes to Elijah where he is and invites Elijah to watch and listen.

And Elijah does. Elijah recognizes God's typical skill-set: the shattering winds, quaking earth, blazing fire, "I'll huff and puff and blow your house down." He gets God as Big Bad Wolf. Elijah's been there, done that, got the T-shirt, he'd seen it before. But God's repertoire was larger than Elijah knew; it also included the sound of sheer silence.

If there is such a thing as male spirituality, I think no small part of it is the discipline of learning to be patient with that silence. The dead calms of life.

Yes, our testosterone theology is wired to accomplish something, achieve something, to spike the football, or slam dunks the basket ball. Or as they say on the World Cup, "Goooooooooooooooooal!"

But, life, particularly parenthood, is not a series of game-set-match events.

For there is a holy hollowness within us humans that begs to be filled, but can only be done so by God. It is a God shaped vacuum.

God may be in the "Goooooooooal!" But God is also with us on the bench and in the locker room, and on the death bed when there is nothing to do but to die held in the arms of God.

The crazed man of the tomb also learns this. God may be able to break strong chains like the Incredible Hulk, but God is also able to be quiet and still. Text says, "And they found the man sitting, clothed, and in his right mind." That's a miracle.

No longer is his identity Legion or Master of Multi-tasking. He is a mended-man, maybe a dad who wants to go with Jesus, but Jesus says no, go home. Go tell your story. Go live not only as a manly man, but as a mended-man.

Now, I know. Elijah will find himself again in the cave of fear. Guys do that. Sure Mr. Legion will find himself wandering from time to time, overwhelmed by the scattered pieces of his life like tombstones in a graveyard.

But the miracle is that God specializes in spelunking; God likes to work the graveyard shift. God comes to us where we are on this Father's Day and every day, in our broken places, gracefully attending and mending.

Amen

**These are some of the notes James Lamkin used in preaching this morning's sermon. The Lectionary does not have specific scriptures to be used on Father's Day. To paraphrase a great philosopher/theologian, Forrest Gump's Momma, "The lectionary is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you are going to get." However, from today's texts, both challenge and comfort are plentifully found.*