

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – Year A  
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
1Kings 18:16-45  
Pastor Paul Horn

April 20, 2008

**“Me? Stand up for Jesus???” Or is it, “I will stand up for Jesus!”**

*<sup>16</sup> So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. <sup>17</sup> When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?” <sup>18</sup> “I have not made trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the LORD’s commands and have followed the Baals. <sup>19</sup> Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.” <sup>20</sup> So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. <sup>21</sup> Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” But the people said nothing. <sup>22</sup> Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the LORD’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. <sup>23</sup> Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. <sup>24</sup> Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God.” Then all the people said, “What you say is good.” <sup>25</sup> Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.” <sup>26</sup> So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “O Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. <sup>27</sup> At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” <sup>28</sup> So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. <sup>29</sup> Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention. <sup>30</sup> Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which was in ruins. <sup>31</sup> Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.” <sup>32</sup> With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. <sup>33</sup> He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.” <sup>34</sup> “Do it again,” he said, and they did it again. “Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. <sup>35</sup> The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. <sup>36</sup> At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. <sup>37</sup> Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” <sup>38</sup> Then the fire of*

*the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.* <sup>39</sup> *When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!"* <sup>40</sup> *Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.* <sup>41</sup> *And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain."* <sup>42</sup> *So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.* <sup>43</sup> *"Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."* <sup>44</sup> *The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"* <sup>45</sup> *Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.*

During a recent taping of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* a panel of new age movement experts discussed the many paths to enlightenment. Oprah positively agreed with them and made reference to a book entitled *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn, stating, "...that one of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe that there is only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to what you call God."

When corrected by a Christian woman in the audience that Jesus said He was the only Way, the panel lost their composure and became unglued. Oprah reacted, "There couldn't possibly be only one way...Does God care about your heart or whether you called His Son Jesus?" Would you have had the courage to stand up on a television program which is viewed daily by millions of people all over the world and profess the truth about Jesus like that Christian woman or would you have sat there quietly and kept the truth to yourself?

This morning in our lesson we find the prophet of the LORD, Elijah, engaged in confrontation with King Ahab of Israel. In vs16 we read that Ahab greeted Elijah by saying, **"Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"** We have to back up three and a half years ago to understand why the king would address a prophet of the LORD in such rude manner. The prophet first announced the LORD's judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel in the form of a severe draught. The reason? King Ahab's wife Jezebel had promoted the worship of the heathen god Baal and the goddess Asherah. This government endorsed pagan religion caused many faithful believers to fall into gross sexual worship practices. Elijah was considered a troublemaker in the eyes of the king and queen since he blamed the lack of rain on their unfaithfulness to the LORD.

But Elijah was not the troublemaker. Ahab and Jezebel were the real troublemakers. So, to prove once and for all which god was the true God, Elijah proposed a showdown between Baal and the LORD. Unwittingly Ahab cooperated with the LORD's plan and summoned everyone from Israel to Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah.

When the people of Israel and all the false prophets had gathered Elijah challenged the people of Israel and asked them, **“How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”** And notice their response, **“But the people said nothing.”** He asked them to pledge allegiance to something, but they refused to stand for anything.

When someone asks you, “Who’s your favorite NASCAR driver?” You don’t hesitate to give them the answer, “Matt Kenseth.” If someone asks you, “Who’s your favorite basketball team?” You don’t hesitate to answer, “UK!” or “Louisville!” and you hope the answer will offend the inquiring party. And especially if your alma mater is playing a game you will yell and stomp and cheer and defend your team to the death. Why is it that we don’t do the same for our Lord Jesus?

When engaged in a religious conversation and someone professes the Oprah Gospel that there are many paths to heaven, why do we stand there and say nothing? When someone expresses their support of a woman’s right to murder her unborn baby, why do we just let that slip by and change the subject? Or when the topic about some sort of sinful behavior is promoted, why do we quietly zip our lips shut? Why do we let false doctrine go unchallenged? “Well, I don’t want to offend. I don’t want to come across as arrogant. I don’t like confrontation. I don’t want to cause friction or lose a friendship. I don’t want to be labeled a religious nut or a Bible thumper.”

Why do we give in to those excuses? It’s my rotten, stubborn, selfish sinful nature that cares only about me, and how people will perceive me and my popularity. Elijah could have thought about his popularity with the people of Israel or with the King and Queen. He could have easily hurried away when he saw that crowd of 800+ prophets facing the little old lonely prophet of the LORD. But he stood up, boldly, to defend the truth of God’s Word, even though he was the only one.

And notice the great contrast between the frantic dancing and shouting and self mutilation of the false prophets to the simple prayer of Elijah. And what amazes me is the content of his prayer. He doesn’t ask for fire to fall from heaven. But he asks that God’s glory be revealed. He asked that God would show that he is the true God, and that through his display of glory the hearts of the people of Israel would turn in repentance to the LORD and seek his forgiveness. He wasn’t interested in winning the challenge. He wanted to save souls.

And the LORD immediately responded by consuming the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and even the water. And immediately the people recognized and acknowledged the true God. Elijah then carried out the LORD’s command to his people of Israel (Deut 13:5; 18:20), **“Anyone who preaches false doctrine shall be put to death.”** It is also significant to note that the same day rain began to fall from the sky. Baal and Asherah were considered fertility gods, not just for the procreation of children, but for the fertility of the soil. So to have no rain for three and a half years was a slap in the face to those gods. And then it begins to rain after all of the the prophets were executed was another slap in the face of the false-god Baal.

Don't you wish the LORD would show his power that way among us? That way we could show all the people of the world who the true God really is! He does, just not through mighty acts like one we saw today in the lesson. But he shows his might through his Word. In Jeremiah 23:29 he says, **"Is not my word like fire, and like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces?"** When we were still in the stubbornness of our unbelief the Holy Spirit used the powerful jackhammer of his Word to crack open our dead, stony hearts, and with the power of his Word created a new, living heart, with a new attitude that gladly follows God's direction. And now, as Christians, when we give in to our sinful nature and make excuses why we should not stand up for Jesus, his Word acts like fire. Jesus asks us, "Why do you not stand up for me?" Those words burn our souls and sear our consciences. His Word convicts us and points out our sin. Those words hurt. But those words are meant to produce the same result that Elijah had in mind when he spoke them: contrition, i.e. sincere sorrow over our sins, which produces repentance, a turning to the LORD and seeking his forgiveness. And when we turn in repentance he shows the power of his Word again, and lovingly grants us forgiveness.

We approach the altar of the Lord's Supper as poor, miserable sinners and unworthy. But our Savior miraculously takes bread and wine and through the power of his Word assures us that his flesh and blood are there too, and he puts his body and soul in our mouths as a way to give us salvation, his acts of saving us. Jesus never wavered when asked to stand up for the truth. Not once did he sit on the fence. When challenged to prove that he was the Son of God, he took that challenge. But he did not prove it with might, but in weakness, on a cross. The sinless one became sin for us. For all the times we have failed to stand up for Christ, he stood up for us and took the punishment that our sins earned us. He then stood up and walked out of his grave, winning life eternal for us.

Through his Holy Supper Jesus strengthens us and motivates us to be bold. Through his Word he empowers us, especially when we hear how he so unflinchingly stood up for the truth, especially when we hear how Elijah stood up to a mob of false prophets. This past week in your daily *Meditations* devotions, you read about how the apostle Stephen stood up for the truth, even when it was not convenient for him. He was put to death for defending the truth. These examples prompt us to stand up for Jesus, to defend the truth of his Word, every truth, even the teachings that seem like tough love, even those teachings that may cause offense. And our goal is not win the argument, but to win souls for Christ, to turn back the unrepentant to the LORD.

And let's not be obnoxious Christians, just like there are obnoxious fans in the world of sports. But in a loving way invite unchurched people to our congregation. Tell them, "We would love for you to be our guest." When someone begins to debate or argue and get hot while discussing religious matters, speak the truth, but in love. When they see how you respond with love and not with harsh vindictive words, they may be won over. And always bring the conversation back to our main goal; sharing with people how Christ won heaven for them. And if you're not great with Scriptural responses, educate yourself, equip yourself to answer. Come to Bible study or our new Bible Information Class. Ask your pastor to teach you how to share a simple law and gospel presentation.

When conversations move to issues such as the right to life vs. the right to abort, stand up for Jesus and defend the unborn. Remind the individual that life is a gift from God, and that he decides when our time to go is. When someone talks about the many paths to God, respond by saying, “I can see how you might feel that way. But since it’s God’s heaven, and he determines who gets there, let’s see what he has to say about it.” Stand up for Jesus!

Currently on Oprah’s webpage there is an article posted by an author who has her own religion of which she is the only member. In the article she encourages her readers to make their own religion. Test every idea with your senses. Notice whether an idea unifies or divides. We trust our souls to the embrace of uncertainty, to the reliability of our senses, and to the grand, mysterious impulse that has always led human beings to create religion. Imperfect, foolish, and fallible as we are, each of us seems to be designed—and maybe even guided—to find our own Way. (*Blinded by the Light? Getting on the right spiritual path. by Martha Beck*)

If we try to find our own way, we would be lost forever. Thank God that he revealed to us the Way, the only Way, through is Son Jesus. And now go out with your knowledge of the Way, empowered by his Word and Sacraments, and know that it’s not a question anymore, “Me, stand up?” It’s a statement of confidence, “Yes! I will stand up for Jesus!” Amen.