

“Thank You Note”
The Reverend Michael L. Delk
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage Kentucky
12th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14B) – 11 & 12 August 2018
I Kings 19:4-8

I thought it might be nice if we sent Elijah a letter from all of us, to let him know how much we appreciate his work, but before I send it on Monday morning by Fiery-Chariot Express, I wanted to share it with you, in case we need to tweak it or something.

“Dear Elijah,

All of us want to say, from the bottom of our hearts, “Thank you for giving up.” We know you don’t like to be reminded of that time when you went out into the wilderness, frightened by Jezebel’s threat to kill you, and told God, “It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life.” It wasn’t one of your better days.

No doubt, you’d hoped that, after a while, everyone would forget this embarrassing little episode, and you never dreamed that somebody would write it all down, and then that book would come to be regarded as Holy Scripture, read by billions of people all over the world for thousands of years. But that happens sometimes, and at least you didn’t have camera phones and Snapchat and paparazzi to deal with, so on the whole, it could have been worse. Besides, most people don’t read the much Bible anymore, do don’t worry about it.

Still, we understand why you’d like to keep this quiet. You were on a big winning streak, and that’s where anyone would want the focus to be. You raised that lady’s boy from the dead, caused a drought, ended the drought, gave the false god Baal a serious beat down on Mount Carmel, and then killed all 450 of his prophets, which, frankly, makes you look like a bad winner, but that’s OK.

Of course, it's that winning streak that makes your weakness in the wilderness seem even worse. Now none of us are judging you, but it's just such a sharp contrast. God did amazing, powerful things through you, so if anyone ever had good reason to trust God, it would have to be you. But we get it. Even the best prophets get tired of dealing with homicidal royalty and feckless people who worship false gods. Those are ripe conditions for burnout, for abandoning your call and feeling like life is hopeless, and to some degree, all of us have been there, including your fellow prophets.

In fact, that's why we're writing you, to thank you for giving up. You see, when our faith is shaken and falters, when we're not sure that we can trust God anymore, we can feel terribly ashamed. So, ironically, your discouragement actually encourages us, because we know that we're not alone in our frustration with how the world works, and we know, thanks in part to you, that God really does listen to us when we feel desperate and afraid. Even when we're not making a lot of sense, God listens and answers, maybe not in the way we'd like – I mean, God didn't smite you like you'd asked for – but God does respond in a way that gives us strength to endure.

For you, that support came in the form of an angelic messenger, who woke you up and brought you some food and water and encouraged you to continue the journey of faith. For us, it's rarely that flashy. We just take each other food – both practical and spiritual – when we're going through tough times, but maybe when we do things like that, we're acting on “the better angels of our nature.” So it's not full-on angel for us, but we're still messengers of love, offering hope in many different ways.

We also appreciate how you accepted the angels' help, which is the other reason we're writing, because accepting God's help, however it comes at us, can be very challenging. You

started by giving up, but in the end, you gave in to God. A lot of people say, “Go away. This isn’t what I asked for.” You could have said that, but you didn’t. Others say, “I’m unworthy. I don’t deserve your attention much less than the goodies you brought me.” You could have said that, too, but you didn’t.

Some of us have the attitude that we’re fine on our own and don’t need God, and some of us don’t even notice when God’s gift comes into our lives, because we’re so frantically busy and nervous about the future that we can’t dwell in the present moment and see the grace right there beside us.

But you, Elijah, you ate and drank and eventually went on a forty day-and-night trek to the mountain of God, and we think that’s awesome, how you accepted the help given, how you gave in to God, even when it wasn’t what you wanted, even though you probably felt like you didn’t deserve it. And you took that gift from God and put it to good use. You came back to your senses and got back in the game. You followed God’s path and obeyed His purpose for your life.

That’s really inspiring, and we’re grateful, mainly to God, but also to you, because by humbly accepting God’s help, you helped God pour grace and mercy into the world. You’ve shown us what it takes, and what it means, to be truly alive. You’ve shown us that when we feel discouraged or disappointed or frustrated, when we feel like nothing’s possible, that everything’s possible when we let God into our lives. Your story, even the bits you’d rather us not know about, sparks our imagination and helps us envision a better future than the one we fear based on what’s happening in the world right now.

So, anyway, thanks again. Thank you for giving up, and thank you for giving in and accepting God’s help. Seeing a famous prophet like you get so low and then allowing God to lift

you up and turn your life around, well, it's helpful. We look at you, and see somebody a lot like us, and that gives us hope. Your story reveals that no matter how many times we give up on God, God never gives up on us.

Sincerely,

The People of God at St. Luke's

P.S. Please tell Jesus thank you for all the care packages, especially the bread of life, which gives us the strength to endure. Too often, we take it for granted and forget to share with him how much it means to us, the sacred bread he gives for the life of the world that keeps people who are spiritually starving energized and alive. We don't know where we'd be without it."