

## **Take a Step Back**

Take Care: Part 1 “Take a Step Back”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – May 30, 2021

Pentecost

**Readings:** 1 Kings 19:1-16

**Reflection:** Psalm 46

**Greeting:** Let your faithful love comfort me Lord. Let your compassion come to me so I can live again. Your word and your instructions are my joy! Your righteousness lasts forever! Praise the Lord!

**Prayer:** God our guardian, you know the worries in our hearts and the troubles that weigh on our minds. Refresh and renew us by your Holy Spirit, and give us a right heart, that we may be strengthened in faith so that we may more fully love and seek that paths you lay before us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 46

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. “Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.” The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. (Psalm 46 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 46 and we hear of God’s grace in our troubles. That God is with us to shelter us and give us strength. That God is always with us wherever we are. Do we take the time to be still with God? Do we step away from our worries so that God may strengthen our faith? How do you seek our God in your life? How do you share hope with others?

**Prayer:** O God, help us to seek you as we care for ourselves. Help us to step back from our troubles to find comfort in you. Help us to seek out your love that you may strengthen us in our faith and our hope. May you always guide us and lead us by your righteous hand. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading is from 1 Kings chapter 19, verses 1 through 16.

*Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, how he had killed all Baal's prophets with the sword. Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah with this message: "May the gods do whatever they want to me if by this time tomorrow I haven't made your life like the life of one of them." Elijah was terrified. He got up and ran for his life. He arrived at Beer-sheba in Judah and left his assistant there. He himself went farther on into the desert a day's journey. He finally sat down under a solitary broom bush. He longed for his own death: "It's more than enough, LORD! Take my life because I'm no better than my ancestors." He lay down and slept under the solitary broom bush. Then suddenly a messenger tapped him and said to him, "Get up! Eat something!" Elijah opened his eyes and saw flatbread baked on glowing coals and a jar of water right by his head. He ate and drank, and then went back to sleep. The LORD's messenger returned a second time and tapped him. "Get up!" the messenger said. "Eat something, because you have a difficult road ahead of you." Elijah got up, ate and drank, and went refreshed by that food for forty days and nights until he arrived at Horeb, God's mountain. There he went into a cave and spent the night. The LORD's word came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?" Elijah replied, "I've been very passionate for the LORD God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too!" The LORD said, "Go out and stand at the mountain before the LORD. The LORD is passing by." A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the LORD. But the LORD wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the LORD wasn't in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the LORD wasn't in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood at the cave's entrance. A voice came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?" He said, "I've been very passionate for the LORD God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too." The LORD said to him, "Go back through the desert to Damascus and anoint Hazael as king of Aram. Also anoint Jehu, Nimshi's son, as king of Israel; and anoint Elisha from Abel-meholah, Shaphat's son, to succeed you as prophet. (1 Kings 19:1-16 CEB+)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We begin a new series today. And the series is called "Take Care." In it, we look at different ways that we take care of ourselves so that we can be. Our first message is called "Take a Step Back" and it's about stepping away to regain focus to care for ourselves to be able to do what we need to do. To start, we look at a prophet, the prophet Elijah. Elijah has been doing God's work has been going out and doing what needs to be done. He is trying to get the people back on track. But it takes a toll on Elijah. Elijah gets a message that his life is in

danger. And now he's scared and it's too much. He's terrified. He just wants it to be over. And he runs away. Now we could look at that and say well Elijah ran away, he's not any good. But I think what's important is that we look at God's response. Elijah is scared and he runs off to the desert, and he runs off any he hides, and he just wishes to die there alone. He feels that he's failed and now he's no better than the people who turned their backs on God. So, what does God do? He lets Elijah take a nap. He lets him rest, and he sends a messenger to feed him. Not just once but many times. Elijah wakes up, and there's food and water. So, he eats and he drinks and he refreshes himself and he goes back to sleep. And on his way to go see God, God takes care of Elijah. Elijah's not out doing the work of a prophet at this point, as we would expect, he's not out getting back to work right away, he's not out getting back into the grind putting himself at risk again. No, Elijah's resting and God is feeding him while he takes a little journey. Whenever he wakes up, there's food for him. And he's refreshed until he makes it to God's mountain.

Now, at this point, I want to note that this is really important for all of us. Because Elijah feels like he has failed. Elijah thinks that he is no better than his ancestors. That all of his work has been for nothing and that he should die just like those that betrayed God. But here's God's messenger going "you know what have something to eat, take a rest, and you're going to go do something different for a little bit." So, he takes this journey, stepping away from all the duties that he had. He steps away and every day God is there to feed him and to make sure that he's doing all right. He's taking a step back from all the work that he had been doing and is on this journey really for himself. Because Elijah has been doing all sorts of work for Israel, all sorts of work for God. But God doesn't say, "hey, you failure! You're supposed to patent doing my work. Why are you out here?" God takes care of Elijah.

So, Elijah continues until he makes it to the mountain, and he sleeps in a cave, and the word of the Lord comes to him. God wants to know why he is there. Elijah tells God that he has tried hard to do everything for God. But the people won't listen. They've killed the prophets. They've torn down the altars. He feels alone. He's scared and they want to take his life too. And Elijah doesn't know what to do. He's lost. So, God says go stand on the mountain. The Lord is going to pass by. So Elijah looks. There's a wind, but he doesn't see God in this great wind. There's an earthquake, a tremendous earthquake. And he doesn't see God. There's a tremendous fire, a powerful fire! And he doesn't see God. Finally, Elijah hears small noise. Thin and quiet. Something small. Something not frightening. Something not showing tremendous force. So, he goes to the cave's entrance. And there he hears a voice again. The same voice as before, asking "why are you here?" He repeats himself that he's alone, that the people haven't listened to him. So, he's told to go and anoint two kings, a king for Aram and a king for Israel. And to anoint Elisha to succeed him as prophet. At first one might think that Elijah might take that as a bad sign. Somebody is supposed to succeed him. Does that mean he's failed? No. Thing is, Elijah has been doing so much and now God's giving him help. Somebody that will be able to take over for him so that he knows that the work will carry on and that it's not all on his

shoulders. Because now Elijah isn't the only one left. Elijah will have anointed two kings and somebody to take over his work. God has given Elijah people who can help him and help take on the task that he has. He isn't chided for taking a step back. He is comforted.

What I get from this is that God isn't going to punish us for when we feel overwhelmed and need to take a break. God's going to recognize when we've pushed ourselves too hard. Elijah gets a nap and a snack and starts to feel better. By the time that Elijah makes it to the mountain he's no longer asking to die out there in the wilderness. He's simply telling the Lord his problems. And the Lord responds by helping to lighten the burden. This is important for us to know for our own self-care. God isn't out there berating us when we're trying to do our best. God is recognizing when we have tried so hard that it nearly breaks us, that we need to be able to step away. To build ourselves back up to be able to go back out and do the work that we need to do. And it's important that we be able to recognize that had Elijah kept going, he might not have gotten the message that he needed to have somebody to take over his work. He may not have gotten the message that he was going to put new leaders in place to try to set things right. Worst off, Elijah might not have been able to do the work that he actually needed to do because he would have been so worried about everything else going on. Elijah as a bundle of nerves too afraid to do what he needed to do wasn't going to be of any help. But he hadn't given up on God. He didn't go out and say "God, you abandoned me. God, you failed me." Instead, he said "God, I just can't keep doing it all." And God said, "all right, take a break and I'll watch over you. Take a step back, and I'll still guide you." And it wasn't through a show force as something terrifying. But as a still small voice, a quiet sound that came to give comfort to Elijah in his hour of need.

For me, that says that sometimes we have to step back. Because sometimes we're looking for God in the fire, in the earthquake, in the whirlwind, and we're looking for something great and huge when, really, it's the small, quiet sound that we need to do able to hear. And it's important for us to be able to step back, when things have gotten too difficult to be able to take a rest in God, so that we can be refreshed and renewed, so that we can keep going. Elijah gives us an example of the way that God looks after us even when we think we've failed. That God doesn't want us to burn out. God doesn't want us to reach a point where we simply go you know what I can't do your work anymore and we quit. That it's better for us to stop, take a step back, and spend some time alone with God, so that we can be refreshed and renewed and ready to go out again, to get back on the path.

So, the point is this. Don't beat yourself up, just because anxiety and fear make you feel like a failure. Take your concerns to God and let God care for you in your time of need, so that you may rested and feel refreshed, so that you may continue to do all that you've been called to do. That if we know Christ is with us, then we know that Christ sees our fear and sees our anxiety and sees our worry and understands. Understands that we need to be able to take a break and to go out again once we are capable. But that we aren't to push ourselves past our own capabilities. We need to remember that God is always there to help us. That Christ is

always there to refresh us. That the Holy Spirit will guide us to where we need to be, even if it's away from our duties and into a small, quiet place where God can give us what we need to go on. So don't push yourself too hard. Don't break yourself to the point that you cannot do anything. But take a step back and turn to God to find what it is you need to be able to be refreshed and renewed and keep going, knowing that God will take care of you. And know that even when we take a step back, that we are still in the hands of a loving and merciful God, and that we may always put ourselves faithfully in the care and the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** Have Mercy upon us, O God, according to your loving kindness. According to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out our transgressions. Wash us thoroughly from our iniquities, and cleanse us from our sins. For we acknowledge our transgressions, and our sin is ever before us. Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us remission of all our sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Take Care**

Our series is *Take Care* and each week we will look at different aspects of self-care and the ways God helps us to take care of ourselves.

May 30th – *Take a Step Back* - 1 Kings 19:1-16

June 6th – *Take Responsibility* – Acts 22:3-21

June 13th – *Take Alone Time* – Matthew 14:22-23; Mark 1:35-38; 6:30-32; Luke 5:15-16; 6:12-13

June 20th – *Take Advice* – Exodus 18:13-26

June 27th – *Take a Friend* – Genesis 2:4b-22; Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

## **Prayer List**

|   |                            |                       |                             |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Rev Charliam Renner                         | Bishop Frank Beard         | Our Conference        | Our Healthcare Workers      |
| Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew |                            | Angie Veach           | Eric Veach                  |
| Cathy Devall                                | Brock McMorris             | Ed & Verna Titus      | Henry Catey                 |
| Jake Kiser                                  | Cindy Cisney               | Nancy Hoke            | Don Wells                   |
| Tricia Adkins                               | Ronnie & Elaine Carlen     | Don Stewart           | Michael & Makenzie Reynolds |
| Ronnie Winstead                             | Annie McMorris             | Dwight Parsons        | Trinity Powers              |
| Lauren Stewart                              | Charlie Henderson          | Rosalee Chancellor    | Phyllis Gable               |
| Sage Martin                                 | Dalton McFarland           | Family of Davey Yaw   | Family of Wilma Clark       |
| Terri Kemper                                | Darrell Quick              | Family of Hugh Eubank | Shelley Murphy              |
| Family of Doris Devall                      | Family of Doris Devall     | Family of Macel Buss  | Family of Winona Saathoff   |
| Jeff Davidson                               | Richard Durham             | Kathy Hanks           | Nora Werner & Family        |
| Wayne Carrell                               | Gary & Mary Winterrowd     | Leo Smith             | Bonnie Hite                 |
| Donna Graham                                | Kevin Drum                 | Greg Williams         | Eloise Buffenmeyer          |
| Martha Roberts                              | Charlie & Charlotte Baxter | Paul Schulte          | Kim Hennes                  |
| Family of Gene Mayhood                      |                            |                       |                             |

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