

## 1 Kings 19:1-7

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup>Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.' <sup>3</sup>Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

<sup>4</sup> But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.' <sup>5</sup>Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' <sup>6</sup>He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. <sup>7</sup>The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, 'Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.'

## John 16:31-33

<sup>31</sup>Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe?' <sup>32</sup>The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. <sup>33</sup>I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!'

## Christian Hoosiers

I spent this last week on vacation in Indiana and Ohio, and the first three days in Hoosier National Forest in southern Indiana, not a spectacular national forest like you'd find in the Rockies, but a very pleasant, quiet, and beautiful place nonetheless. "What is a Hoosier?" you may ask. The term is a few hundred years old, and the most plausible theory has it as an insulting word, meaning something like *hillbilly* or *redneck*. Of course it is the name given to several sports teams from the University of Indiana, perhaps the most renowned being the men's basketball team. 'Hoosier' has thus come to mean hard-working and disciplined, like a professional athlete. Today I'd like to challenge you to be a Christian Hoosier, a disciplined and hard-working Christian because (let's face it) we need to be strong and disciplined if we expect to change this world for the better. We're in the worship series "Living into God's Future," and today we want to focus up our spiritual discipline, which is like an athlete's discipline, disciplined exercise, diet, and sleeping habits, all the disciplines that prepare an athlete for the contest. There are so many challenges out there, and to live as a professional Christian athlete, as a Christian Hoosier, you need to be motivated to win.

Which means we have to be clear about what we are out to win. What is the prize? What is the goal? And Jesus teaches us in scripture that a winner is one who wins entry into the kingdom of God. That's not what most people in this world are out to achieve; they are out to gain financial security and comfort, perhaps even luxury. There's nothing wrong with tending to your own *needs*; the problem is people have a hard time distinguishing between needs and wants, and

always we want more than what we need. People want to have enough money to do the things they want to do when they want to do them and have the things they want to have when they want to have them. And generally the world assigns the label “winner” to those who achieve these goals.

But a winning Christian is quite a different thing. Of course we understand and appreciate God’s grace; we can find a little peace in knowing that we can sin against God and, pursue the same things that others pursue, and still know that in the end you will be welcomed into God’s kingdom, but in the here and now, are you really playing on Jesus’ team? Are you a Christian Hoosier? You can’t pursue both the things of this world and the kingdom of God; Jesus says as much – you cannot serve 2 masters, God and money. Some people try. Some people try to gain a limited kingdom for themselves, building little castles with limited power to protect their limited wealth, and they think that they can allow God limited access to their lives, and of course God accepts their invitation, even when it’s on their terms. They like God’s company but they want God to reside in their little kingdom on their little terms, and God can’t do that; he doesn’t surrender his kingdom to you but rather invites you to dwell in his kingdom. But as long as you are attached to whatever is in your kingdom – your wealth, your pride, your power – you don’t accept his invitation to join him in the here and now, and you certainly aren’t playing on his team.

And it shows in your faith or lack thereof. Those who get so wrapped up in their own wealth and security have not learned to place trust in God, and their uncertainty shows. Those who have strong faith show it through strong giving; they give freely because they trust God to give freely, and the more they give the more they see God’s giving to them.

Perhaps you’re afraid to join Christ’s team, because the game can get rough. Today’s Old Testament Story illustrates this. Elijah is a prophet of the True God of Israel, but King Ahab and his wife Jezebel are more interested in idols than in God. Elijah calls them on their idolatry and proves to them that the gods they worship are no gods at all, and it provokes the king and queen to anger. They declare Elijah their enemy and send out soldiers to kill him. Rough game. It’s so rough that Elijah wants to quit. Those can be the stakes when you join Team Kingdom; you open your mouth once too often to the wrong people and they try to kill you.

But the story doesn’t end with Elijah just throwing in the towel. God intervenes, feeds Elijah, and preserves his life. That’s the message we find time and time again in scripture; God comes through in the end. Jesus says in today’s Gospel lesson, “In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” And this is true for the Christian Hoosier. If you are courageous and face the evil in this world and in yourself, God will help you overcome.

And remember what Jesus tells us in our Gospel lesson; he says, “I have conquered the world.” It’s true; death could not keep Jesus down. He overcame it through the Holy Spirit, *and so can we*. We can’t overcome it all at once – it takes time and commitment. Today I encourage you to start building your faith through prayer. Then put your new-found faith into practice, taking

risks, being less stingy and selfish with those around you. Trust in God's providence, so that you may truly live the abundant life that Jesus has promised you.