

**Sermon 24**

St Philip and St James  
Palma de Mallorca Spain  
19<sup>th</sup> June 2022  
Trinity 1

**Theme: Meeting God in Unexpected Ways**



**TEXT: I Kings 19:1-4; 8-15a**

## Introduction

Let us pray. Gracious Lord, we thank you for this day and the opportunity for the ministry of your word. I pray for guidance and anointing as I speak your word to your people, Amen.

Nineteen years ago as a newly ordained priest, I was appointed to be an assistant priest for the rural district of Silobela, in the Midlands province. I was in charge of twelve worship centres in that mission district but reporting to the archdeacon. I was among the first four young men in the Diocese of Central Zimbabwe who were ordained while in their youth, so many parishes have never experienced having a young priest of my age at that time.

I arrived at my new home on a Friday night with the district meeting to

introduce me scheduled for the following day at another worship centre ten kilometers away from my new home. Since this district was geographically huge, many people did not know each other. I woke early and in no time I was already at the meeting venue. I did not put on my collar. When I arrived, they were three elderly people, two lay readers and the district treasurer. They were busy sweeping the church yard and preparing the meeting place under a huge tree. When I arrived they greeted me and no one ever thought that I was the priest they were preparing for, so they gave me some work to do. I joined them gladly and 30 minutes later, the treasurer sent me to the grocery store that was about three hundred meters away to buy some biscuits and one liter coca cola drink for the priest. Coca Cola is not my favourite beverage, so I bought fanta which was my favourite

one. When I returned back the treasurer was very cross with me because I had purchased the wrong thing but I apologized and deceived him that the Coca cola beverage had finished. In an hour's time, almost everyone has arrived for the meeting but the priest was missing and they were beginning to wonder at what might had happened to the new priest. I then approached the treasurer who had sent me earlier to buy the drink for the priest, and asked him if we can start the meeting. Then he said to me, "young man, how we can start the meeting without the priest because the purpose of this meeting is to meet the priest and know him." With a smile on my face I replied softly, I am already here, can we start the meeting please? He couldn't say a word because of shock.

Yes, they had their own experiences of how priests look like. They had an experience of having old priests with grey hair. Priests who would not go to church business without their collar. Priests who would not join them in doing manual work at church. They met their new priest in an unexpected way. This story is an introduction of today's sermon with the theme: **Meeting God in Unexpected Ways**. My sermon is based on our first reading I Kings 19:1-4, 8-15a.

## Exegesis of the Text

Today's story of the prophet Elijah fleeing from Jezebel is a continuation of the drama that had taken place in chapter 18. Jezebel upon receiving the news of the death of his prophets in the hands of Elijah responded by sending a death threat message to him. Elijah upon receiving the death threat message fled for his life, first to Beersheba which was under the control of Judah. This means that he had fled to a safe space where Jezebel could not touch him. Chapters 18 and 19 of I Kings give us a picture of two different Elijahs; a courageous, strong, powerful, and enthusiastic Elijah in chapter 18 who slaughtered 450 Baal prophets, and in chapter 19 a hungry, exhausted, dejected, fearful, and suicidal Elijah who runs for his life. Second, upon arriving in Beersheba he still feels insecure, he left his servant there and

takes another day's journey into the wilderness. Geographically, he appears to be safe but his words and actions do not indicate any sense of relief or safety. He sits under a desert bush and asks for God to take his life. Unfortunately, our lectionary jumps from verse 4 to verse 8, God's response to Elijah's request is contained in these three missing verses. In summary, God send an angel to feed him and that gave him the strength to take a forty days and forty nights' journey to Mt Horeb. In the bible the names Mt Horeb and Mt Sinai are used interchangeably suggesting that it was at the same mountain that Moses had encountered God. He hide himself in a cave, and God asks him what he is doing there? Elijah gives a direct response; he is running for his life because people want to kill him. Instead of rebuking him, God announces his presence and ask Elijah to come out and

meet him. First, there is violent wind and He is not there; second, there is an earthquake and He is not there; third, come fire and He is not there and when everything had calmed down, there He comes in the sound of fine silence. What an amazing God, who does not do the obvious. In other translations His coming is in a gentle whisper (NIV), sheer silence (NRSV), and 'still small voice. (KJV). Elijah hears this unique silence; he covers his face with his cloak because in the Israelite theology, no one would see the face of God and live. Therefore, Elijah protects himself before going out of the cave to meet God. Has forgotten about his desire to die? God repeats the same question; what are you doing here Elijah? The forty days of forced rest and retreat had changed Elijah's perspective and readiness to encounter God. Now he is in the right perspective and ready to commissioned

with another dangerous task of  
anointing Hazael as the King of Aram

## Application

The thrust of today's text is not about Elijah the prophet but God who met him; responding to his situation, providing for his needs, and ultimately redirecting him. In the times of his internal struggle, his fears and doubts, and his private withdrawal in the wilderness, God meets him. It is a passage that reminds us that during difficult, painful times, God is still there, and sometimes He reveals himself in silence. God sometimes reveals Himself in unexpected ways and for that reason sometimes we fail to recognize His presence. His revelation to us is unique and it takes the gift of the Holy Spirit to discern His presence. No one has a template of how God should reveal Himself to His people. At Pentecost, He appeared in a rushing wind, but to Elijah He was not in the wind. To Moses he appeared through a burning bush and at Pentecost again He also appeared through tongues of fire, but to Elijah He was not in the fire. To Paul and

other disciples while in prison, he appeared to them in form of an earthquake, but to Elijah he was not in the earthquake. He comes in unexpected silence. To appreciate the beauty of silence before God, I would refer you to the book: *Silence and Honey Cakes: The Wisdom of the Desert*, by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. Let us be still and know that he is God. Amen.

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