

Running, Hiding, Rising

Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath, June 29th, 2025

Wall Street United Church

We meet Elijah lying in the wilderness, lying under a broom tree, and he is done. He's done physically, he's done mentally, he's done spiritually. He's done and wants to be done. He wants to die. He tells God he wants to die.

Elijah was a prophet of God. His job as prophet is to call those in power, the king Ahab and queen Jezebel to do better — be better rulers! To love God and to love God's people, and they are doing neither. It's a thankless job and even when things go well, it's hard.

Ahab is the king of the northern kingdom of Israel and his wife is Queen Jezebel. Ahab is weak and corrupt and his wife, **Jezebel**, was a Phoenician princess who strongly promoted the worship of **Baal**, a Canaanite god. If Jezebel has never been on your top 10 list of names to call your daughter — she's the reason! In Jezebel's defence, women in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, are either super good or super evil. You're either Mother Mary or Jezebel — and women in power are more likely to be Jezebel, especially when they are foreigners — as queens tend to be. So, while she is clearly not in the running for a Nobel Peace Prize, take her portrayal with a little grain of salt.

So after a giant showdown on Mount Carmel (you can read about it in 1 Kings 18), Elijah is on the run. Maybe he's afraid, maybe he's tired out ... but after he runs far enough to feel safe, he just wants to give up trying to make the world more as God intended it. If you've ever had suicidal thoughts, know that some of those closest to God in the scriptures have felt the same way. Depression is not about a lack of faith. No one is immune from depression, rich or poor, faith-full or faith-less: it can afflict anyone one of us.

Elijah does what we all do — and what is really not good to do when we are down and depressed. He isolates. He also projects that isolation. He keeps saying things like *"I've been a servant of the Most High and I alone am left!"* He says this a few

times. The problem is it's totally not true. I call "Bull crap!" on Elijah. He knows darn well there are other faithful servants of God. In just the last chapter he talks with Obadiah, whose name literally means "servant of the Lord". Obadiah works in the palace, and tells Elijah how he has hidden 100 of God's faithful prophets in caves and has continued to supply them with food and water.

But Elijah is exaggerating and projecting what he is feeling. He feels like he's alone and he's the only one trying to save the world.

God doesn't coddle Elijah, but he does care, and he meets him where he is. An angel is sent to give him bread and water and he is left to rest. And then an angel comes again, and gives him more, and then tells him to get moving! That he has a mission and a purpose — to get to Mount Horeb. Elijah is not given a ton of rest or a ton of food, but he's given enough.

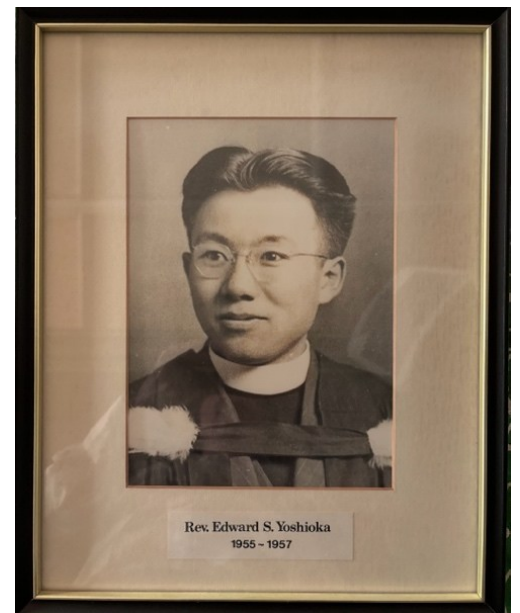
The world is exhausting today. I care, and then I get tired of caring. I want the world to change and be better. I want the desperate situation for Palestinians, especially in Gaza but in the West Bank as well, to change and get better. I'd like to eliminate several world leaders and replace them with humans who are not billionaires and who actually care about life and humanity, instead of oil, money and military might. So I step into the pain of the world ... and then I can't take it, or the basement starts flooding or the dog throws up and my energy gets focused on digging up a backyard or whatever. So we tend to pendulum swing between caring and giving up.

As followers of Jesus we are called to care. We can't do it all and it's not all up to us, but we are called to do what we can do to make our world and our country better places.

This is the Canada Day weekend, even though actual Canada Day is Tuesday — and I can't get over the number of Canadian flags everywhere! Our Mayor put out a call to fly the Canadian flag, but even without that call people are showing their pride for this country. I'm proud to be Canadian. But part of that pride lies in us as a nation being willing to look at the past with truthful eyes instead of rose-coloured

glasses. We've done some incredible things; but as a nation we've done a lot that has caused great harm. Some of that came out in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but I also think of things like the Internment of 21,000 Japanese Canadians during WWII. When Japan entered the war and especially when they bombed Pearl Harbour, Canadians of Japanese descent — particularly those living on the Pacific coast— were seen as suspect and as potential enemies. The Canadian government registered every person of Japanese descent and then seized and sold their property— we're talking farms, homes, cars, fishing boats, beds and lamps. It did not matter if they were recent immigrants or if they were born in Canada and had no other home. Most were relocated from the Pacific West coast and many were held in camps. After the war many were pressured into a mass deportation from Canada. Remember these people had done nothing wrong. They had committed no crimes; they were only 'guilty' by virtue of being of Japanese descent.

Interestingly, one of the ministers here at Wall Street in the 1950's was Rev. Edward Yoshioka, who was born in Vancouver to Japanese immigrant parents. His father, Yoshinnosuke Yoshioka, was also a United Church clergy serving in Kelowna BC. Edward began his studies at the University of British Columbia, but in 1942 when the country started rounding up Japanese Canadians, he was one of the fortunate ones to be allowed to move and study at Emmanuel College (the same school I went to which is part of the University of Toronto).



When it was time for him to be ordained by the British Columbia Conference Edward had to get a permit from the RCMP to travel to BC, and he had to have proof of where he was going afterwards. That was a problem because at the time

upon ordination you were sent and settled somewhere, and ordinands did not know in advance where they'd be going! These are some of Rev. Yoshioka's words in our history book *The Meaning of these Stones*:

"Before the RCMP would give me a permit, I had to show them a return ticket. I couldn't get a return ticket because I didn't know where I was going from Vancouver ..." He goes on to say "If only people would realize that though we may look different, we are just as good Canadians as they are, then life would be happier for everyone. These regulations and restrictions really don't work severe hardship, but it's the principle of the thing." (p. 269)

I'm kind of impressed that Wall Street hired Rev. Yoshioka, because I'm guessing that the culture of mistrust may still have been lingering towards Japanese Canadians in the 1950's. And the fact is that even today it is more difficult for racialized Canadians to find jobs. It is definitely more challenging for racialized clergy to find placements and calls in United Churches. By all accounts Rev. Yoshioka was well liked here. Sadly, tragically, his wife Jean died while in childbirth near Christmas time at the age of 33. The cross that stands on our communion table is in memory of Jean Yoshioka. You are welcome to take a look after the service. A few months later Rev. Yoshioka resigned at Wall Street so that he could care for his newborn son, and he returned to B.C. to be closer to family.

When I was in high school in St. Catherines my best friends' father, Dr. Arthur Shimizu, was someone who was instrumental in demanding that the Canadian government issue an apology to Japanese Canadians for this terrible chapter of our history. I remember learning all about it in the 80's as I hung out at their house. I was young and so had never heard of this chapter in our history. As well as being an amazing doctor, (he was a Nephrologist), he was a great and funny guy too — but on top of that he believed strongly in making wrongs right. His daughter Jill wrote that he used to say "If you ever have a time that you can make life easier for someone else, just do it. Why not?"

I am grateful that in 1988 the Canadian government did finally apologize and offered compensation to those Japanese Canadians who had been wronged. I'm

grateful that as a nation we are able to face and acknowledge those terrible chapters in history. But it would be better if we just didn't do terrible things in the first place. It would be better if we treated all people with love and respect because they are created in the image of God. Activists today often take on the role of prophet — of standing up to government and powerful people and saying “*I see the evil you are doing! Do better!*”

I don't know why countries and governments don't learn from history and care about humans and creation. As a people of faith we call this sin — it's a separation, a broken relationship between us and God, between us and other people, between us and creation. I do know that one of our callings in life is to make the world a little bit better. We are each different, so we do this in different ways. Some of you serve breakfast or a Sunday supper and so provide space for community. Some of you make phone calls or send cards. Some of you make sure that the building is truly accessible for all.

When we think we are alone or when we focus in too much on all that is wrong in the world, this can be a difficult and wearying task.

But we're not alone. God keeps calling us. God is there to give us the 'enough' we need so that we can continue to do the work we are called to do.

Elijah makes it to Mount Horeb where he is told to go. He huddles in a cave and waits and laments again that he's the only one. God appears. Elijah is used to God appearing in tremendous big ways — like the fire that consumed the altar (and I can't help but wonder if God is trying to tease Elijah to come out of the cave!) but Elijah is just not impressed — he just can't be bothered. So when the fire happens, Elijah doesn't come out. When the earthquake happens, Elijah doesn't budge ...and when the tremendous winds blow, Elijah stays put. But then God truly appears in the most surprising way of all ... and Elijah can't resist that call. God knows Elijah, he knows his strengths, and he knows his weaknesses and he loves him enough to keep calling him in a '*still, small voice*', and it works. Elijah emerges and has the courage (or the audacity!) to complain again. God ignores the complaint and sends him on to meet some of the prophets of God — God sends

him to be with people who are doing similar work — to remind him that he really is not alone, and that God is not finished with Elijah yet. There is more to do before God releases him from his life's work and he's taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire!

You're still here, so God isn't done with you either. You are not alone. Trust that God will give you what you need to keep going. Trust that God has a purpose for you that matches you — your gifts and disabilities and your limitations and your passion.

Make this world, this community, a better, more caring and loving place for all.

Thanks be to God.

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