

FAITH CONVERSATION
June 2, 2013
1 Kings 18:20-39
The Fire Came Down
Rev. Janice M. Lamott Adams

Everyone loves a contest! Look how the Olympic events capture our attention! Millions have gathered in arenas all over our globe and around their television sets, rooting for their favorite contestants. And here at home, baseball and football stadiums fill to the brim with fans loudly cheering on their teams.

There was a dramatic contest today's reading from 1 Kings! Did you hear it? A contest was held between the one true God of Israel and Ba'al, an idol god, invented by the people. Things had come to a head after a three year drought. There was severe famine in the land. Their frantic cries for their god of the harvest, Ba'al, to bring rain, had not been answered. People were in panic mode!

Elijah, the prophet, dared to appear before King Ahab, saying the drought was God's punishment for the people's disobedience. He and his people had given up on God's commandments and worshiped another god. Elijah received the king's permission to assemble all the Israelites and the prophets of Ba'al. When they had gathered, Elijah addressed them:

**"How long will you go limping with two different opinions?
If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Ba'al, then follow him."**

Elijah was eager and ready to test these people. Two identical altars were set up with wood and sacrificial meat atop them, but not set on fire. The Ba'al worshipers were to pray to their god to bring down fire to light their altar. They wept and they wailed but no fire came down. Seeing no results from their efforts, Elijah began coaching them. "Try crying louder. Try again, louder, louder!" In Mendelssohn's Elijah oratorio, the choir sings over and over: "Baal, we cry to thee! Baal, we cry to thee! Hear and answer us!" But there was no answer and no fire.

After rebuilding the altar of the God of Israel, Elijah doused it several times with water, covering both the wood and the sacrificial meat. Then he drew near to God, offering this beautiful prayer, intoned in Mendelssohn's oratorio by a beautiful baritone voice:

**"O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known this day that you are
God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your
bidding. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that the people may know that you, O
Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."**

Then the fire came down from heaven, consuming everything, wood, meat, stones, water and even dust. The people fell on their knees crying:

"The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God."

We are all born with a deep longing for God, our Creator. But, like our Israelite ancestors, we wander away, trying to fill our empty God holes with things of our own creation.

We like to be in control. So we put our trust in little deities like money, success, material possessions, celebrities, and the wonders of new technology. We expect these idols to fill our lives with joy, happiness. and fulfillment.

In desperation, some of us try to fill our empty God spaces with alcohol and drugs; with sex; with food; with unhealthy relationships. We turn to these idols to provide relief to our hurting souls.

Elijah, the prophet, reminds us, as he did our Israelite ancestors, that despite the idols our culture worships, we must turn our hearts back to the one God. God demands our full devotion and worship, not just on Sunday mornings but twenty-four seven. Because our God is in a covenant with us; is committed to us, will always pursue us in love, to keep our hearts fully devoted to God. And when we turn away from God, like the people did in Elijah's day, God can and will use any means necessary to turn our hearts back to God.

This story from 1 Kings, is a wake-up call to re-commit ourselves to worshiping, trusting and following the one true God, our Creator, Redeemer, and only Comfort in life. May we experience the fire from heaven, falling upon us and re-kindling our lives.

Amen.