

Sermon: *Why Are You Here?*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels by the Sea 6.22.25

A seminary professor said that we should pay attention when God asks a question in Scripture. Today's lesson from 1 Kings 19, God asks the same question, twice! I'd suggest we should pay attention.

So, let me ask you the same question: why are you here?

This morning, we woke up to find that the US has bombed three locations in Iran to end their nuclear program. No preacher woke up this morning and knew what they were going to say. None of us. Some of my friends, especially in the DC area, have congregations with mission statements that talk about justice and standing up for social causes and the like. Their sermon is going to be different than mine today. The mission statement of All Angels is the: To bring the Living Christ to those inside and outside the church. Today, my message will be about bringing the Living Christ.

Why are you here?

The last time I was asked that question was on Monday of this past week. I was at my yearly physical check up. My medical doctor looked at my results and found that I am healthy and doing just fine. She rolled up in her chair, looked me straight in the eye, and asked this: David, why are you here?

I said, "I'm supposed to be, right, I mean we're supposed to get a yearly physical." She replied that I was correct but she asked again, why are you here? She waited to see if there was some other reason why I wanted to meet with her; some hidden medical condition, or really anything at all. It's a good question for an MD to ask everyone.

But, why did God asked (the greatest prophet of all time) Elijah, why he was where he was not supposed to be. Doesn't God know? Wasn't God aware that Elijah had just done a tremendous act of destroying the altars of a false god and then, when his life was threatened by the king and queen, he ran. Didn't God know that already?

Like with my MD, that was the presenting case; but, was it the real reason why Elijah ran? I think when God asks us, "Why are you here" it's an invitation for self-reflection. Why are you here?

God said to wait for him on the mountain. There was then a violent wind, then a firestorm, then an earthquake. But, as Scripture says, God was not in the windstorm, the fire or the earthquake. After all those natural disasters, there was silence. When Elijah heard the silence, he went out and God spoke to him.

This tells me that God is not in the storms – or the cause of storms – in our life. God is in the silence that follows.

On Thursday, our scheduled lector for today, Terry, called me from the ER. He had lost the ability to walk, suddenly, and was afraid (for very good reason). Yet, you all witnessed today, Terry got up and read to us. It's a walking miracle, frankly.

I asked and received permission to share with you a part of his text that he sent on Friday. After telling me about all the tests that they ran, he wrote: Here is what I know, every struggle that is unpredictable in my life that I have to face... I am not alone. God is my source of love and grace. He surrounds me with strangers who care for me and protect me. I am not afraid because I feel his Holy presence and Spirit within me. My past I cannot change, I do not know what the future holds. Today is the day I choose Him. To believe in Him, to cherish the love that my priest and the congregation shows me, and for this I am blessed. And, I believe, God is not done with me yet!

And, here's Terry, standing in front of you, two days later.

God is not in the storm because God is in you. God is with you wherever you go.

Why are we here? That was the question I asked after Hurricane Helene overran the entire island. My Lutheran pastor friend has \$2M damage to his church. My pastor friend at the Chapel has \$800k. Christ Church, Longboat Key, is still adding up the damage. Us? We had to replace our outdoor lights. We've had about \$20k in landscaping. But that's it. Why are we here? Why are we still here?

That question fueled me to open our Comfort Station – to have electricity, A/C, internet for anyone on the island who needed a break. We are here to bring the Living Christ to those inside and outside the church. God's not in the storm; God is with us, and God lives inside us to help one another who have experienced the storms of life.