



**Rev. Tami Forte Logan**  
**Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church – June 19, 2022**  
**1Kings 19:1-15A (1-15a)**  
**Returning to the Wilderness**

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**Introduction:** When Marcia and I were scheduling dates, neither of us realized that this Sunday, would be both Juneteenth and Father’s Day AND it is no coincidence that the FATHERS of my family, my father Paul Forte, his father, Gus Forte, his father Willi Forte, and his father Matt Fort who are all now my paternal ancestors ...all happen to have their beginnings in the State of Texas, where the story of Juneteenth began. According to the Texas State Historical Association, the one accredited for bringing this “Good News” to Galveston, Texas on June 19, 1865 was Union Commander, Gordon Granger who officially declared **that the institution of slavery was dead**, setting off JOYful displays by Texas freedmen, woman, boys and girls. And so, my great-great grandfather, Matt Fort, would have been about 18 at that time. And I could imagine that he and his family and 40 plus OTHER enslaved black folks on the Fort plantation with him in Bowie County, Texas would have been celebrating like we are today with food and music and art and dancing and lots of laughing. Now the Lord knows I love good food and music and being in the company of my black siblings and just lapping up Black Joy!

But then this prophetic voice rises up in me... the facts, the truth of a matter begins to flood my brain. And THAT part of my being, that part that wants to remain in a feeling of “all is well”, and to see life with rose colored glasses is QUICKLY jolted BACK into reality. And so, my brain just can’t seem to linger in this celebratory matrix for too long.

Because the truth is, Juneteenth was not embraced by White planters, their families and many White people across Texas, the south or the nation. Slaveholders did not see the humanity of my Black ancestors. They were mere labor, a commodity, a means to wealth, and the huge profits they were making from extracting their labor was now threatened. 49% of taxable property in Bowie County, Texas at that time was Black people. And so many of the plantation owners retaliated. They threatened and terrorized and killed formerly enslaved black folks who tried to leave the plantations. Representatives of the Freedman’s Bureau, a government entity set up to help formerly enslaved folks transition into freedom was frequently attacked. A disgruntled white man named Cullen Baker went on a killing spree against Black folks and any white folks who tried to assist them. He managed to evade the

authorities and continue his terrorism because many whites shared the same sentiment. So it is hard for me to linger in a state of celebration around Juneteenth, or July 4<sup>th</sup> or any celebration related to America for too long.

But there are times I do linger, you linger, we all linger, and if we are not careful, we can become STUCK in this state of mind rooted in an **illusion** of exceptionalism or of white supremacy, because it is what we know, it is what we have been raised in, trained in...what we have practiced the most. Theologian, Walter Brueggemann calls it a “royal consciousness.” A consciousness that is beholden to the “royals”, the king and queen, the president, to a political party, to denomination, to hierarchy, to SYSTEMS **rooted** in white supremacy, **sustained** by capitalism, and **justified** by religion. When INSTEAD our consciousness SHOULD be rooted in relationship with God AND with one another.

So, we have built a lot of muscles strengthening the narrative of our exceptionalism as a nation and our superiority as a people. Progressive movements, leaders, organizations AND churches have mastered the language of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion without ever naming RACE or grappling with the intersections of all oppressions... AND the stark reality is that black bodies are disproportionately and adversely impacted by every single system, every single oppressed group in this country.

But the prophet part of me is always in tension with this reality. Because I don't want it to be true, I don't want to always be able to predict that racial inequity is at play and be proven right. But it is what God often puts in my mind, my heart and soul and sooner or later its gonna' come out of my mouth. And so SURPRISINGLY I am not always welcomed in all spaces, there is an atmosphere of suspicion that often seems to surface the moment I walk into a room. AND perhaps I am seen as a troublemaker.

**Background:** But most prophetic voices ARE including Elijah. Elijah was referred to by Ahab as the “Troubler of Israel” as well as those in power, those who were STUCK in their idolatry. And they hated to see Elijah coming. And when he DID, they just KNEW he wasn't going to bring ANY good news, because he usually didn't.

Like Elijah there are moments I have felt like the Troubler of Asheville, of progressive and other churches, and other spaces...NOT that I create trouble for ANYONE, but because there are times I am compelled to speak truth in places where BAAL, where royal

consciousness, where white supremacy and its preservation is the reigning GOD. In those spaces where folks SAY they are COMMITTED to liberty and justice for all, where we spout collective liberation and equity, but the moment no one is looking we do as we have always done.

Illustration: My grandchildren Amina 4 and Amari-5 have picked up this bad habit of saying “Im sorry” the minute they realize they are caught doing something they are not supposed to, without even thinking about it. They seem to just instinctively know they should not do or say the thing and almost as a reflex, here it comes. “I’m sorry!” But the TRUTH is they are not sorry. They may be sorry they got caught, but they really have no intention of changing their behavior, because the moment they think you are out of sight, they are doing it again. **Somehow**, they have internalized this message, that as long as they say Im Sorry! They can STILL do what they want to do without consequences.

Adults committed to this “royal consciousness” to the ILLUSION of white supremacy do the same thing with no intention of ever changing, or adjusting and **forget** transformation! But they will work overtime saying the right thing, reading the right books, presenting the OPTICS of equity, of fairness, of righteousness, but the truth is when they think no one is looking.... When equity is no longer a requirement... when demographics of board composition are no longer a thing...They go back to business as usual.

Now Jezebel and Ahab were different. They didn’t care about optics, how they appeared, who saw them, who heard them...they wanted what they wanted, when they wanted it, how they wanted it, and IF you confronted them with the truth, they would figure out how to get rid of you ASAP.

Now I don’t know why Elijah went beyond calling down fire from heaven to consume the altar and the water around it, and ALSO ordered the death of 850 prophets whose allegiance was to Jezebel. Perhaps it was his interpretation of Levitical law which was pretty violent. But because of his violence whether one could make an argument on whether his actions were justified or not, it had consequences.

**Pericope:** So this scripture passage in 1Kings 19, begins with Jezebel putting a hit out on Elijah. A contract if you will, to have him killed AND she TOLD him she was going to kill him, she didn’t hide it, she didn’t plan it in a back door meeting, she sent the message directly to Elijah.

Jezebel was ENRAGED that Elijah had her prophets killed. Her prophets whose voices nurtured her cognitive dissonance, whose voices told her what she wanted to hear, whose voices placated her anger, stroked her ego, justified her greed, and narcissism and overconsumption. Those were the voices she wanted to hear. She did not want to HEAR Elijah.

She didn't want to hear the truth. She did not want to hear that her behavior was wicked, that her treatment of the poor was ungodly, that the history of her people was not the FULL story, so Elijah's prophetic voice coupled with the silencing of the false narratives she wanted to hear sent her into a murderous rage against Elijah.

Now Elijah is this confident, powerful, spiritual prophet who could tap into the supernatural power of God with a gesture of his mantel. He could call down fire from heaven, is the only prophet, other than Moses, that shows up in the company of Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration, had first-hand experience with being provided for by God in the middle of a famine, brought a dead child back to life, And yet, in THIS moment Elijah is VULNERABLE.

He is human, with feelings and emotions and pain and grief and depression, and he has found himself both literally and figuratively **IN THE WILDERNESS**, in a desert place, a dry place on his journey with GOD, where he feels afraid, that he just can't take life any more. Now at FIRST he runs in fear from death, but by the time he spends a day in the wilderness he is ready to just DIE. All it took was one day to wear him down, to bring him down to the state.

Illustration: Have you ever been there? There are days when you just feel like you are on the top of the world. Things in your life are going well, and even when conflict or challenges come, you can pivot, they are easy to address, you can move on and you feel confident in the Lord and in God's presence in your life.

But just ONE day can change it all. Even when you know that you know that you are a child of God. You know that God loves you, that God has taken care of you, has empowered you to do things spiritually that even surprised you. You may have even had an amazing life, most or all of your life, and YET you find yourself in this slump, suicidal thoughts kick in, and you hear yourself like Elijah saying, I can't take it anymore, I can't do this anymore, LORD I WANT OUT!

And so in THIS pericope, in this scripture passage, after all that Elijah has endured, after all he has overcome, after following the call of God and the WILL of God ... NOW we find Elijah 1<sup>st</sup> running for his life into the wilderness, and then asking God to take his life.

But the good news is that we serve a God who specializes, who knows exactly what we are going through day to day and moment to moment and knows exactly we need, And what Elijah needs more than anything else is REST.

ELIJAH IS TIRED, Elijah is exhausted. He has been ministering in the midst of a famine, bringing a dead child back to life, prophesying to powerful people which is always draining, and literally running to get where he is. So he IS EXHAUSTED.

Illustration: Because we live in a capitalistic society, we are always driven to produce at all costs, even the costs of our own health. And we will tell ourselves that the good we are doing is needed, that if we don't do, it won't get done. But you just die and the people you left behind will continue, and life will go on without you.

But the other side of this is that oppressed people of culture are always trying to prove their worth. That they are good enough or better than their white peers and it can be crazy making but more importantly detrimental to our health.

Illustration: Years ago when I served as an Executive Director for Neighbors in Ministry-Rise and Shine Freedom School. I worked 70 plus hours a week, was the first one there and the last one to leave, and had so much on mind on any given day, that I could not go to sleep unless I had a pad next to my bed, so as any task came to mind I could get it out of my head, and write it down so I could sleep. And then the headaches and stomach aches and back aches came and worst of all, young college interns who worked with our children during the summer were watching me. And one day I finally realized I was setting a bad example for them. That the need to pace themselves, breathe and REST, eat was basic. And I needed to STOP so that THEY would never START.

Then when I resigned after 14 years there, it was hard for them to adjust. The new leadership did things differently, but the program kept going and they will celebrate 20 years this fall. So we should never fool ourselves into thinking that we are the only ones that can do anything, because ANYTHING God ordains GOD WILL SUSTAIN.

And so, because GOD had ordained Elijah and knew Elijah needed rest, when Elijah finally stopped running, God made SURE Elijah landed under the shelter of a Broome Tree aka Juniper Tree in the middle of the wilderness. And this Broome tree was covered with white,

fragrant, honey smelling flowers that had a relaxing aroma therapy impact that allowed Elijah to relax enough to REST.

And Elijah is so exhausted that he has to be awakened to eat a couple of times and when he finally eats enough to strengthen his body for the 40 day/40 night journey ahead of him, the first place he heads is to mountains of Mount Horeb, not on the mountaintop, but he hides in a cave. And God questions him, “What are you doing here Elijah?”

Illustration: some of us are out of place and hiding in caves in our lives, dumbing down, staying below the radar as much as we can. But if we are not standing squarely in the will of GOD we are in the wrong place. And like Elijah we are quick to make excuses, to justify why we don't do more, that we can't do more, that we need to know more first. But it is still an excuse that will not move you any closer to your liberation or the liberation of us all.

Many of us have these moments, and Marianne Williamson's poem “Our Deepest Fears” is my go-to when I get into the funk of internalized oppression. *“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”*

But we can't see or be that light without being truthful to ourselves first. So, Elijah's excuse and untruth makes NO sense and definitely does not get him closer to God. But he fabricates one anyway, “Lord I am zealous for you (as if no one else is) , but (THEY) the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your places of worship and killed all your prophets except me and now they are trying to kill me too.” That is NOT what GOD asked him AND it is not true. Elijah is not the only prophet left, because Obadiah who was in charge of the King and Queen's palace, hid 100 of them from Jezebel. But when you are exhausted your mind will tell you anything.

Rev. Dr. Patricia A Gainer, my former pastor, used to always say if you tell God the truth, God can help you. And God wants to help Elijah. What are you doing here Elijah? What are you doing here Tami? What are you doing here GCPC? We have to GET OUT of the caves, the silos, our comfort zones, our functions in church that keep us disconnected from others. In that cave, Elijah can't hear or see God, what he heard was a wild wind, a raging earthquake and the fire, but it was not until he calmed down, was still, RESTED his mind that he began to hear the gentle whisper of God's voice and when he get's out of the CAVE he can hear everything God is sharing with him.

What are you doing here Elijah? Elijah you can't stay in the cave, you can't stay in your fear, you can't stay in your excuses, you have to GET OUT and go right back in the wilderness. He had to go right back to the place he was running from, right back into the difficulties he was facing, right back to the things HE thought he was going to be able to leave behind. **Returned to the wilderness.**

Illustration: My racial equity journey began with majority white mainstream congregations. When I left Brevard and worked for CPC I was immersed in Latinx and Black cultures in Asheville. But then during the pandemic God sent me right back to white dominant spaces. I was returned to the wilderness.

**Conclusion:** So, we have to be willing to acknowledge our fears, stop running, stop making excuses, rest and really listen to the voice of God. But he can't hear and we can't get closer to God until we get out of our caves. Out of our comfort zones, out of our familiar places and spaces and people and instead DO what he Spirit of the Living God is gently whispering for us to do. In the name of the Father. In the name of the Son. In the name of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.