

At first glance, this is a resounding victory for Elijah, the prophet of God. Against overwhelming odds, the cause of God has triumphed. The good guy wins – the ‘enemies of God’ are defeated. All is right with the world.

Except that’s not exactly true, is it.

This grand gesture, immortalized in our shared Scripture, does not mark the end of Elijah’s problems...or for that matter, the problems faced by God’s people.

Elijah is still pursued by Ahab & Jezebel. He escapes to the wilderness and hides out in a cave – and God meets Elijah and sends him back to civilization – back to face reality – the problems of the world don’t disappear just because Elijah eliminates four hundred of his competitors.

This is one of those Old Testament stories that seems to suggest that God will find a way – no matter what – to win the day. A story with everything; tension, intrigue, mystery (and magic) and of course, ‘holy violence.’

We are guilty of reading this and thinking “Oh, for the good old days, when godly work and wisdom could lay waste to the godless, pagan – that God would ‘speak and act,’ in a way that sent the enemies of God a real message. It is stories like this that lead humans to the conclusion that there are good, godly reasons to take violent action against your enemies...because they MUST be enemies of God.

And this is our reminder – on a day that we remember the grief and horrible reality of the cost of war – that we are on a learning journey. Scripture will (if we let it) guide our long and often convoluted trip from old ways of thinking to Jesus’ way of thinking. If we read and consider Elijah’s story without knowing or learning Jesus’ lessons, we are not getting the point of this collection of holy texts.

Jesus is described to us from the beginnings of his story as the “Prince of Peace.” We hear that (and sing about it) happily enough, but what does it mean for those who would follow Jesus in times of intense local or global conflict?

It is really hard to shake off the age-old notion that God’s people **MUST** be on the side of righteousness...in any fight. Through both of the global conflicts of the early 20th century, faithful folk on both sides of the line prayed for God’s protection and claimed God’s presence as they rumbled through Europe and bombed out city centres full of civilians. We want our causes to be righteous – but that doesn’t mean they are. Political interests and political operatives talk of ‘just war’ and ‘measured action’ and ‘necessary response.’ But we are not always well served by Political interests...we need a theological response.

“Ah, well that’s what Elijah is for – a good, solid theological response to the godlessness of his day.” Sorry. No.

Elijah was offering theological cover for a political response – and that’s not the same as a theological response. Elijah is fighting for his life – literally – and makes a stirring “God is with me...whose side are you on” speech, and then methodically eliminates his defeated opponents. This is NOT how God calls us to act when we are threatened. Remember, God will eventually coax Ellijah out of hiding and back into the thick of the argument that his violence failed to solve.

So why do we need this story? Why haven’t I given you a dose of Jesus’ gospel of life and peace?

Because until we acknowledge that the peace of God not only passes understanding, ***but surpasses our efforts to claim it and keep it only for ourselves***, we will not really understand the gospel at all.

If we preach crucifixion and resurrection as a reward for those whom **we** declare worthy, then we pervert the gospel and sell short the love and mercy of God.

If, in our innocent arrogance we use our understanding of the Scriptures to dismiss the humanity of our opponents (*they don't believe what we believe*) then we cheapen the gospel of grace, and underestimate the power of the resurrection.

If we stand in solemn moments to remember our dead and give thanks that the fighting has stopped and we were victorious, we need to remember that grief in a losing cause can foster anger and resentment, and so the cycle of violence is allowed to continue.

The Christian notion of turning the other cheek is not meant to leave us open to abuse, rather it is a stance that should have us understand the futility of violence. The 'turn the other cheek' option puts shame on the violent and forces them to see the futility of their actions. A *Theological* approach to a violent world ought to break the cycle of violence, not justify it.

As followers of Jesus, we should not abide any argument that supports violent actions by using arcane references to the inevitability of war, or the necessity of war, or the 'it's our God-given-free-will-that-is-to-blame' argument. (almost as bad as 'the devil made me do it.')

We are called, by our relationship with Jesus, to approach all of these troublesome human encounters with grace and with a recognition that God is on both sides – God's people are not a singular nationality, but a grand conglomerate of ideas and individual frailties, and all of us are looking for peace.