

**“Sing of God’s Mighty Acts”**

The people were lost, confused, divided over what they should do.

Sometimes they were true to God;

other times they got impatient and turned to other methods, other answers, other gods.

But Elijah? Elijah was FULL of faith.

His God could do absolutely anything and Elijah wanted EVERYONE to know it.

But no matter what he said, he couldn’t convince people.

He could have preached ‘til he was blue in the face and it would have simply gone in one ear and out the other.

It was time for a sign.

He knew that’s what the people needed.

So he stepped out in faith and proposed a contest:

he, the lone remaining prophet of Israel versus all 450 of the prophets of Baal

to see which one of their gods was the most powerful,

which would answer prayer,

which would send fire from on high to light the sacrifice on the altar.

Elijah let the 450 prophets of Baal go first –

they picked their bull, prepared it and put it on the altar,

and all day long they prayed to their god to set it alight.

They cried, they danced, they shed their blood – all to no avail.

And then it was Elijah’s turn.

But instead of just asking God to set his sacrifice alight, he does something first.

Elijah wanted to make sure that everyone knew just how powerful his God was

so to make it even tougher he had them dig a trench around the altar.

He had them pour water onto the sacrifice, onto the wood, onto the altar –

so much water that it filled the whole trench around the altar

and then he called on God to light the fire.

And God sent such fire down that it not only consumed the entire sacrifice,

but all of the wood, all of the altar, and even all of the dust.

Wow. The God who could do that can do anything!

And that’s the God in the Bible.

That’s the God in whom Jews and Christians have believed for over 4000 years.

That’s the God whom generation after generation after generation has shared with the next generation.

The God of Elijah is also the God of Jesus.

And that’s clearly seen in today’s gospel when Elijah actually appeared with Moses

and visited Jesus at the top of Mount Tabor

when Jesus is transfigured in such a way

that his 3 disciples are transfixed by the brilliant light emanating from him.

That, my friends, is the God in whom we believe.

The God who can send down fire from heaven

and burn up a sacrifice and the wood and the altar and the water and the dust.

The God who can make prophets dead for hundreds of years appear.

The God who can transfigure Jesus so that he shines with heavenly light.

Now I don't know about you but sometimes I find it difficult to believe in a God with that much power. Sometimes I doubt. Sometimes it just doesn't seem possible. I'm betting it's the same with you.

Are there times when you feel like the odds are against you?  
Are there times when you feel that there are hundreds of people on one side while you alone are on the other?  
Are there times when what needs to be done is so great you just can't imagine it ever happening?

Well that's why we have the Bible, this book of faith, these holy Scriptures.  
This book contains the stories of people who have experienced the awesome power of an amazing god, stories that were passed down orally for hundreds, maybe thousands, of years before they were finally written down thousands of years ago.  
And in every generation since then parents have passed their faith stories down to their children and their children have passed them down to their children and so on and so forth from the time of Abraham to this very day.

You and I are here because someone shared their faith with us.  
Maybe it was your parents or your grandparents or your Sunday school teachers or your pastor or a friend who passed on their faith to you.  
What's important isn't just that we remember how people in the past experienced God.  
What's important is that we experience God for ourselves.

I hope that you can look back on times in your life when you encountered God in some way.  
Maybe it was an answer to prayer, maybe you heard God's voice, maybe you experienced healing, maybe you saw God in some way.

And if you did, then it's up to you to share that experience, to tell somebody about it, to proclaim it for two reasons:  
one, to give glory to God  
and the other, to witness to others to the greatness and awesomeness of the God in whom we believe.

If the church is dying,  
then either we have not experienced God or we have not shared that experience with others.

I believe in a God who could send down fire from heaven  
and light a sacrifice with such a fire that it burned up everything around.  
I believe in a God who can show Peter and James and John  
a transfigured Jesus shining in the midst of Moses and Elijah.  
I believe in a God who can raise Jesus from the dead.  
I believe in a God who not only acted in the past  
but is acting right now, doing some amazing things for somebody somewhere  
and who can do marvelous, miraculous things in the future.

Oh there are days when I wonder how long my job will last or how long my husband will have clients  
or how we will pay the bills or if we will ever get to retire.  
There are days when I'm confused about what it is that God wants me to do.  
There are days when the obstacles and challenges and problems that confront me seem insurmountable.  
There are days when It seems that no one is there for me – not even God – and I'm all alone.  
But whenever I have those days of doubt or despair, and I remember to turn to God, guess what?  
God shows up.  
God shows up with an encouraging word from a friend. Or God shows up through some unexpected news.

For me, God recently showed up in answer to my request for a sign.  
A couple of weeks ago I was thinking ahead to the 2020 budget here at Salem  
and I was wondering how on earth Salem can afford to keep me or how I can afford to stay.  
Oh it's where my heart is, it's where my call is, it's where I want to be.  
But how can it work? Will it work? Or is it impossible?  
So I turned to God and said,

“God, if this is where you want me to be, if Salem has the future,  
if we're still going to be here, if I'm still going to be here, please give me a sign.

And the next day I got a phone call.

And the man on the other end of the phone said,

“You remember the grant for Salem, New Direction Ministries, and Genesis to Cosponsor a Workcamp  
to bring 300-400 kids from around the country to repair 40-60 homes in greater Bridgeport  
the summer of 2021, that grant of \$20,000? Well, I'm calling to say you got it!”

And I said thank you. Thank you to the man on the phone. Thank you to the organization he represented.

Thank you to God for answering my prayer and giving me a sign

that Salem and New Direction Ministries and Genesis Gospel Café will still be around in 18 months,  
impacting the city more than we ever have before.

I'm sharing that story with you because I can't keep it to myself.

I'm telling you because I want to glorify God and I want you to glorify God with me.

I want to share with you that I have experienced God in many ways throughout my life,

and God continues to show up to do absolutely amazing awesome things.

It's my job, my responsibility, my duty to tell the world what God has done for me.

And it's our duty to tell the world what God has done for us.

If we don't, then we disrespect God.

If we don't, we deprive everyone we know of that opportunity to glimpse the God whom we love and adore.

And so today on this All Saints Sunday we give glory to God for all that God has done for us in the past,  
we celebrate, we worship and give our praise and thanks.

We do it to glorify God and we do it to witness to each other and to the world.

The more we give thanks, the more we glorify, the more we witness to God's power and love,  
the more God can work in our lives to accomplish miracles.

The challenges that face us may seem huge but to God they are nothing.

The God who created this entire universe, who made every intricate part of your body,

who created every single atom with every proton and neutron and electron and subatomic particle –  
that God has the power to change your life and to change this church.

We're only a small group of people but it's not about us, it's about God.

It's about time we have faith that God can do anything

and that God loves us enough to help us be all that God has created us to be.

We give thanks for all the saints who have gone before us.

We give thanks for the saints here today, gathered around us.

We give thanks for this new saint among us, Elizabeth.

And we pray that God would pour a power into us

that would transform our hearts and minds and spirits and bodies  
and make us the best that we can be

so that we can shout out our praise and sing of God's glory and share our joy in praise and service.

I thank God for all the things that God has done,

I thank God for everything God is going in this moment.

I thank God for everything that God will do in my life, in your life, and in our life together.

It's going to be awesome – I promise! **Amen**