

And I am the Only One Left



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The Prophet Elijah was hiding in a cave when the Word of God came to Him and asked him what he was doing. “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts,” Elijah said. “For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away” (1 Kings 19:10). The despair he feels is evident. Not much earlier, in fact, he had even prayed for death. “It is enough,” he told God. “Now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers” (19:4).

Elijah had recently fled from the city of Jezreel, where the wicked queen Jezebel had threatened to kill him. It was a difficult time in Israel. Over the past several years Jezebel and her husband King Ahab had systematically persecuted and wiped out the prophets of the true God. In their place they had elevated the worship of the pagan gods Baal and Asherah. Elijah escaped the massacre by spending three years in another country. But all the while, we read, Ahab had been trying to hunt him down.

You can understand why Elijah felt so alone. He was one man against many. You can well imagine Elijah praying the words of Psalm 88: “They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together.... Darkness has become my only companion.”

The reformer Martin Luther likewise knew that sense of abandonment. Like Elijah, he stood against the rulers of his day and called them to account for

their false worship. In return, he was condemned by the pope and summoned to stand before the emperor at the Diet of Worms. He was ordered to recant. He refused.

“Here I stand,” Luther is said to have confessed. And while the words may be a later editor's addition, they sum up his overall sentiments. In the face of the combined power of pope and prince, Luther may have stood alone—but he still stood. Unmoved. *Luther contra mundi*. Luther against the world.

But then, that's not quite right. Perhaps it might have been better to say, “Here *we* stand.” For while Luther was the only one on trial, he wasn't alone in his confession of faith. Numerous others had followed him in rejecting Rome's theological errors. Like Luther, they now made their stand on the Word of God—the one sure island of truth in a tempestuous sea of human ideas and opinions (*more on the Diet of Worms on page 39*).

And just as Luther was not truly alone, so too the same can be said of the Prophet Elijah. For he wasn't really “the only one left,” as he intimates. Obadiah, he knew, had saved the lives of a hundred prophets of the true God when Jezebel had most slaughtered. And there were other believers who supported him and his work—not prophets or priests, perhaps, but laypeople devoted to the LORD and not to pagan gods. God tells Elijah directly that He had reserved for Himself “seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18).

But even if this were not the case for Elijah or Luther, it would still be an error to say they were alone. For God was with them. And God had not forsaken them.

When the pressures of the world have you feeling small and isolated, it's important to remember that you, like Elijah and Luther, are not in this alone. God has given you a family of fellow believers to bear you up. We see them in the pews with us every Sunday. We see them also, as Dr. Stephenson reminds us this issue, in the pews of other Christian church bodies (*see page 6*).

More important, though, is this: God is with you. And He will never forsake you. There is only One that God has ever truly and utterly forsaken, and that was Himself. For on the cross, the Father abandoned His Son—*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*—so that He need never abandon you. Through Christ's death and resurrection, we are brought anew into God's family. And though we may desert Him, He never deserts us.

That can give you courage to speak up in a society that increasingly tells Christians to pipe down—something President Bugbee encourages us to remember especially this year during the 150th anniversary of Canada's confederation (*see page 42*). Bolstered by the witness of fellow believers and assured of the continued presence of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to make our lives a great confession—to confess with Elijah that our God is the only true God. To confess with Luther that Christ alone is the source of salvation.

Amen. In this faith may we stand firm to the end.