

**McCabe United Methodist Church**  
**God versus god!**  
**I Kings 18:20-39: June 2, 2013**  
**Pastor Rick Fossum**

The contest took place on top of Mount Carmel in Israel. This was a contest between good versus evil, right versus wrong, truth versus false. In the one corner, was God's prophet Elijah. In the other corner were the prophets of Baal, all 450 of them. In a nutshell, Elijah was saying that his God was better than their god and to prove it Elijah proposed *the contest*.

First, a little background.. At this time, Israel was ruled by King Ahab and his queen Jezebel. The Bible tells us that they did evil in the sight of the Lord. The worst thing they did was to worship Baal. A god of wood and stone. Elijah didn't like this. He thought Israel's king and queen should worship God and God alone. And so there was a mutual dislike between Elijah and Ahab and Jezebel.

The contest was simple. Both sides were to take one bull, cut it into pieces and put the pieces on top of a pile of wood. The rule was this: the prophets could not start their own fires. They couldn't use their Bic lighters or whatever they had back then. The fire could only be started by the Gods they represent.

The prophets of Baal went first. They cut the bull into pieces, put the pieces on their pile of wood and then started calling Baal to send the fire to start the bull roast.

**"Come on Baal,"** all 450 prophets shouted. **"Come on. Do your thing. Start the fire."** In the beginning they were excited. They actually thought Baal could send fire. But the minutes turned into hours and no fire.

The prophets got desperate. **"Come on. Where are you? How about a little help down here? You're making us look bad. If you can't send a fire, send a spark. Anything will do!"**

They tried everything. They danced around the pile of wood . . . all 450 of them. They shouted louder and louder. They slashed themselves with their swords and spears until they drew blood, but still no fire from Baal.

Meanwhile, Elijah started trash talking. He makes the NBA trash talkers look like a bunch of amateurs. He taunted the 450 prophets of Baal. **"Shout louder,"** he teased. **"Maybe Baal is sleeping and can't hear you. Or, maybe Baal has the TV too loud or maybe he went fishing or maybe he's on the golf course. Can't you**

**shout louder? Is that all you have?"**

Finally, the 450 prophets gave up. Baal was not going to send fire to burn up the bull.

Now, it was Elijah's turn. **"Gather around,"** he said to the people **"and watch me."**

Elijah took his wood and built an altar with it. He took twelve stones, representing the twelve tribes of Israel and placed them near the wood altar. And then he dug a trench around the altar. He took his bull and cut it into pieces and laid the pieces on top of the wooden altar. To make it even harder, he ordered the people to pour water all over the pieces of meat and the wood until the water filled the trench. Do you get the picture? Everything was soaked in water. Have you ever tried to start a fire using wet wood or wet leaves or wet paper? It doesn't work so good, does it.

And then, Elijah stepped forward, raised his hands toward heaven and he prayed, **"Lord, the of God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are the one true God of Israel and not Baal. Let it be known that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Now Lord, send your fire down here and show these people that you are God and not Baal."**

Do you know what happened next? Ka-Zaam! Fire came roaring out of the sky and burned the bull, the wood, and the stones. It even licked up the water in the trench! Nothing was left.

When the people saw this, they fell down on the ground and cried out, **"The Lord! The Lord is God. The Lord is the one true God."**

It's a pretty good story. There's more to it, but you'll have to read the rest of the chapter for yourself to find out what happened to the 450 prophets of Baal.

But what about us? So what does this story have to say to you and me? What does a bull, wood and fire have to do with any of us?

The answer is this: We also have to choose which God we serve and it's not that easy. This world is full of gods (with a small 'g') and we have to choose.

The gods are many. There's the *god of self-sufficiency*. This god tells us that we don't need any help. We can live our lives just fine without God or anyone else. We can fix our own problems, thank you. We don't need anyone or anything messing with our lives.

There's the *god of Me*. This god tells us that the world revolves around us. We are more important, more special than the person sitting next to us. We know what's best for our lives. We sit on the throne and no one else. This god is all about me!

There's the *god of We Want!*. The stuff we buy or want to buy is our god. We want a newer car or truck. We want a better and bigger home. We want a better job. We want expensive toys. We want. We want. We want. This god can never be satisfied because our wants can never be satisfied.

There's the *god of Blame*. If our marriages aren't going so well or if we have some other relationship problem, we blame it on the other person. If our health isn't so good we blame it on our doctors or someone else for not taking care of us. If we're depressed or lonely we blame it on whoever is handy.

There is an old Charlie Brown cartoon strip where Lucy asks, "**Why do you think we're put on earth, Charlie Brown?**"

Charlie replies, "**To make others happy.**"

Lucy says, "**I don't think I'm making anyone very happy. Of course,**" she goes on, "**nobody's making me very happy either.**"

Then in the final panel, Lucy screams at the top of her lungs: "**SOMEBODY'S NOT DOING THEIR JOB!**"

We blame everyone else for our troubles, but never ourselves.

In the meantime, there's Elijah and he's watching us as we call out to our various gods. His face is angry and he's saying to us, "**Weren't you paying attention to the story? There's only one true God. All other gods are false. Choose today. Which God will you serve?**"

A twelve year old boy responded to an altar call one night at his church. The next day at school his friends asked him about it. "**Did you see a vision?**" asked one friend. "**Did you hear God speak?**" asked another.

The youngster answered "**No**" to all these questions.

"**Well, how did you know it was God?**" they asked. "**Why did you go up front?**"

The boy searched for an answer and finally he said, "**It's like when you catch a**

**fish. You can't see the fish. You can't hear the fish. You just feel him tugging on your line. Last night, I just felt God tugging on me and I followed him."**

I hope and pray that something like that happens to you today. I hope that God will tug on you and say, "**Put all the other gods behind you and choose me.**"