

## What are we doing here?

Short sermon for Back to Church Sunday  
30 September 2012.

Bible reading: 1 Kings 19: 8-13

“What are we doing here?” “Why are we here?”  
It’s a good question to ask ourselves sometimes.  
For the past few weeks, because of holiday and  
illness, Kathy and I haven’t been here. It was  
strange last week to hear the bells and see the  
cars, and to know that we wouldn’t be part of it.

So why are you here? Maybe because you’ve  
been invited specially for today, maybe because  
you come most Sundays. And there’s nothing  
wrong with a good habit. But it’s good to ask  
ourselves whether coming here on Sundays is a  
good habit or just a going through the motions. I  
know one person at this church who stopped  
coming for a bit because she decided that she  
was coming for the wrong reasons. but she didn’t  
just disappear; she sorted herself out and things  
changed in the church, and she came back.

But there’s all the difference between me asking  
us what we’re doing here, and God asking that.  
That’s what’s going on in that Bible reading.  
Elijah is one of God’s great prophets; he tells  
people what God thinks and what God’s plans  
are. But here he is exhausted, fed up and  
frightened. Isn’t it good to know that Christians

aren't expected to be bouncy and joyful all the time! It's OK to get fed up and exhausted, and to admit it. And God doesn't tell Elijah off; he listens to him and talks quietly to him. Elijah has run away to hide in a cave and to mope, and God asks him twice, "Elijah, what are you doing here?" You might turn round and say, "Well, why does God ask him that? God knows how Elijah is feeling because he is God!" That's true. So why do you think God asks Elijah that? Perhaps to provoke him a bit, to prod him into thinking instead of just feeling sorry for himself; perhaps to make him begin to listen instead of just moaning.

I can think of several times in my life, sometimes in church, sometimes not, when I've been pottering along in my ordinary life, and suddenly I've realised that God was there and speaking to me. Perhaps I've been sunk in my own feelings, like Elijah, perhaps I've been wanting a break from God - Elijah wants that - and God has just quietly spoken to me. Not in a big crash, bang, wallop way, but just quietly and clearly. God doesn't speak to Elijah through the earthquake, wind or fire; he is exhausted, and big, dramatic things wouldn't help him - he's had enough of that. But he does hear God speaking to him, quietly, though clearly.

So perhaps today it's not just me asking you, or you asking yourself, what you are doing here

today. But it's God, and he's saying, "What do you really want? And are you listening? What are you doing here?"

When Elijah has got the rest he needs, he listens to God. He gets the guidance he needs, and in his exhaustion and his fear, he gets the encouragement and lift he also needs. God puts his arm round him and sends him back to do God's work. He didn't expect anything of God; he didn't expect to meet with God when he ran away, but he does.

I hope and have been praying, like many of us here today, that we will all go home knowing that we also have met with God here today.

Chris van Straaten