

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from God's Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Our Savior and our Lord, amen.

When I was a kid it seemed like there was a gas station on every street corner. Slowly over the years many of those gas stations have been replaced by Pharmacies. Now there's a pharmacy on nearly every street corner. Perhaps the only rival to the number of pharmacies in a town is the number of donut shops... I wonder if there's a correlation there... The more donut shops, the more pharmacies that are needed... In the ancient times of the Old Testament I'm not sure they had either pharmacies or donut shops. Under King Ahab they did have a temple on every street corner and high place. You see King Ahab, who was Israel's 7<sup>th</sup> king, if you're counting, had allowed the worship of the Asherah god, Ba'al, into his realm. When Ahab married Jezebell he made a critical miscalculation. He thought he could still worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while also worshipping the pagan god Ba'al. Now, as you know, I've been a Cleveland Browns fan all my life. One of the saddest days of my life was the Sunday when the original Browns played their final game in the old Cleveland Municipal Stadium. I remember going there to see Browns games with my dad when I was about 5 or 6 years old. (SLIDE) On that final Sunday game at Municipal Stadium, I remember the fans tearing up the wood from the bleachers in the Dog Pound and throwing them onto the field... The next season those same Browns players wore

the uniform of a blackbird. Now, considering all the animosity between these two teams, I don't believe you can be a fan of both the Browns and that other team from Baltimore. It's got to be one or the other... Don't even get me started on the Steelers or that team from Denver... You all know where I stand... Now the same thing goes with worshipping Yahweh. You can't be on team Yahweh while also worshipping other pagan gods.

That's the message delivered in such dramatic fashion by the Prophet Elijah. Elijah is my favorite prophet. (SLIDE) I have this marvelous olive wood carving of the prophet that I purchased in Israel. I hope one day soon the fighting is over and peace returns to the Holy Lands. Back when you could still travel to Israel one of the first stops was always at the top of Mount Carmel. This is known as the mountain of Elijah because from here you can see where the Elijah challenged the 450 prophets of Ba'al. Mount Carmel is on one side of Israel and from the top you can see another famous mountain. (SLIDE) This is Mount Tabor. This mountain is believed to be the site where Jesus was transfigured. If you recall from the story of the transfiguration, Jesus met with Moses and Elijah to talk about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. When you're standing at the peak of Mount Carmel you can almost hear the words of Elijah echoing off these two opposing mountains. In the middle you can also see another piece of real estate so important to the state of Israel right now. (SLIDE) This is an Israeli Air Force Base...

OK, enough looking at my vacation pictures from almost 20 years ago...

Besides my main point about picking what side you're on, maybe there's something relevant for us in this story about King Ahab, Queen Jezebel, and the prophet Elijah. (SLIDE) I say this story is about Ahab, Jezebel, and Elijah, but it's really just about Israel's God, Yahweh. Let's look at the situation a bit more closely. First off, who doesn't like a good fight. I remember back in Junior High, these two girls got into a fight behind the school during lunch. These were two girls that nobody really liked, but they sure drew a crowd on the day of the big fight. There was slapping of faces and pulling of hair. There was swearing and foul language. It was the biggest event at our school in months! Everyone gathered around like it was a main event bout. The fight between Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al was the main event for Israel. The entire nation gathered around to witness this epic face off. It wasn't really a fair fight. First off, it was 450 to one! Who would take those odds? Secondly, the offering was a bull. That was the typical sacrifice offered to Ba'al. The sacrifice offered at the Temple in Jerusalem was an unblemished lamb or maybe a pair of turtle doves. Then there was Ba'al, who was worshipped by the Asherah peoples. Ba'al was the god of lightning, so the priests were praying that Baal would do something he had long been credited with doing. All they had to do was call down just one lightning bolt, set the wood on fire and prove once and for all times Ba'al is greater than any other god. The

only problem was the sheer silence. Ba'al wasn't answering. Hello, Ba'al! Where are you? Elijah's comments are dripping with sarcasm. Maybe Ba'al is meditating. That's what our English translation says, but the Hebrew says maybe Ba'al is taking care of business or possibly relieving himself. What?!? At such a crucial time the Asherahian god is relieving himself... Or maybe, Ba'al is not a god after all, but no more than a man-made idol. No matter how high the odds were stacked against poor ol' Elijah, the one true and living God certainly put Ba'al and all his worshippers in their place. (SLIDE) One little prayer from Elijah and poof!!! It's all gone, even the water in the ditch is gone, gone, gone... Our story stops here, but if you read on, Elijah immediately kills every last one of those prophets of Ba'al with the sword. This is why Elijah is often depicted with a sword high over his head. (SLIDE) Here's another view from atop Mount Carmel from my vacation photo album. This tiny stream is called the Wadi Kishon. This is the site where Elijah killed all 450 of those prophets of Ba'al.

The story of King Ahab is tragic. He had some success militarily, but is considered a very evil king according to the Rabbinical historical records. Upon his death, it was reported that dogs licked his blood from the battlefield. Other sources also claim pigs licked up his blood as well. Since Jews believe any contact with pigs makes you unclean, King Ahab is believed by devout Jews to be excluded from the eternal Kingdom of God.

Before we get too judgy, let's remember how easy it is to fall into idolatry. (SLIDE) Martin Luther said, "that to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God." For us today that could mean our Jobs or our hobbies. For far too many we allow our families to become our idols. God requires all of our body's strength, all of our mind's thoughts, and all of our soul's worship. We're Yahweh's and Yahweh's alone. Now for these three in the front row; Mercedes, Claire, and Devyn, this decision you're making today, that you will continue to belong to God, is not a light matter. Just think of the commitment your parents, families, and sponsors or God Parents made on your behalf when you were a baby. All the time and effort put in on your behalf to get you prepared for this day... Judging by how you three have turned out I'd say all those who stood up for you at your Baptisms did an outstanding job and they deserve a round of applause... Before I say the final amen on this sermon I want you to know this is not your graduation from Sunday School. Your 2 years of Catechism barely scratched the surface when it comes to knowing Jesus. You have built a firm foundation for a faith that will last your whole life. Yes, we studied the Bible, but the Bible says something new to me every time I read it. So, I advise you to keep on reading it. Also, having friends at school is one thing, but ask anyone here if they can rely on their family here at Trinity. Your school friends might last until one or both move away to college. These friends and sisters and brothers in Christ in this

congregation will always be there for you. For your sake and for the sake of the Gospel, don't let this be the last time you come to the services of God's House... Not because the Church needs you, but because you need the Church. After all this time studying about God and learning God's Word, in just a few moments you'll get the opportunity to affirm your faith, your trust in this Lord of ours. This Lord who can bring down fire from heaven, but instead loves us and gives us his gifts of Grace and mercy. This is the day you get to stand up for yourself and proclaim along with all the people of ancient Israel, "The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God."

May we draw near and listen to the Word of God every time we're able. May neither the prophets of Ba'al nor the lure of modern-day idols ever come between you and the Lord your God. Amen.