

For a long time the screensaver on my computer was a view from Mount Carmel. It is a place where a heavenly vision is easy: high up, looking over the fertile Plain of Jezreel, it is as if you can see God. It's not difficult to imagine Elijah doing remarkable things there. By the time we get to 1 Kings 19, our Old Testament reading tonight, he has predicted drought, he has multiplied food, he has raised a boy from death, he has challenged a king. Up on Mount Carmel he singlehandedly taken out hundreds of the prophets of Baal, like some superhero in a multi million pound action movie. He can even outrun a chariot.

But you wouldn't think that if you started Elijah's story only at chapter 19 of 1 Kings. Far from being the 'super-prophet' of chapter 18, we now find him completely miserable, and wanting to die. One setback - a threat from the King he challenged - and all his power and purpose and focus just melt away. I'll confess to being deflated on occasions in much the same way. It's as if you've been floored. One minute all is powering on, the next you've been unplugged - and you deflate like a bouncy castle. Some of you may recognise the symptoms of a reactive depression in Elijah: he turns everything inward and it's all about himself. There is no hope, no reason to do anything, exhaustion, gloom, despair.

It takes a retreat, physical care and activity, good food and a change of perspective to get Elijah back on track. He has mistaken a unique call from God for a requirement to do everything by himself, and has taken a temporary setback for a clear proof that he's made a mess of it and that all is going to fail. God helps him put all this in perspective. His purpose remains, but he's in good company, not on his own. It's not all about him: there are 7000 with him, and he is given Elisha as a close companion. His blinkers come off, and he's able to put his life and his ministry and mission into context, ready for whatever comes next. Again I'll confess to the way this works: admitting your deflation to someone else and being open to the encouragement of others leads to restoration, and the recognition that it's not that bad, that it's not up to you, it's up to God.

It is no accident that a mountain is involved. We need a long view, and the greatest perspective, in order to get on with the daily detail where sometimes it feels like there's no time to breathe. Jesus calls us to live with our ultimate end in view, with the declared purpose of everything we do being for the kingdom. Peter, in our New testament reading, recalls the mountain experience where Jesus is transfigured, and his purpose is revealed - strengthening him to go down the mountain and not be deflected or deflated when attacks come.

Distractions to our Christian life can come in many forms: the voices from the past telling us this is not for us, that we're not good enough; the demands of family, work and friendship; the need for security. Jesus's focus is on what is to come, not what's behind us. Other distractions can come from within: Elijah's self accusation, exhaustion, over concentration on himself. We can be too focussed on the task and forget to look after ourselves and see the bigger picture.

What Jesus shows us is that we can 'set' ourselves towards God, and look out for what's happening around us - we can gaze well ahead and look closely at what God is doing here and now. I'm trying to learn how not to be deflated. When you commit to something it's

hard when it doesn't go right the first time. Jesus invites us to follow him without distraction, but also to take the long view, and in all things to proclaim the kingdom of God. If we follow him in doing this, we too will be fit for the kingdom.