

Sermon for August 8, 2021

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In today's Old Testament text we encounter Elijah, the prophet of the Lord, in the depths of despair. He has been called by God to speak a word from God into the ugliness of the world. He has spoken through a many year drought and severe famine. He has spoken as ruler rises up against ruler. He has spoken to people seeking answers who in their despair have turned away from the God of Israel to worship false gods. Many voices have sought to drown out the voice of the Lord. Elijah has witnessed, even instigated, violence and murder. God has asked hard, unexplainable things of him. He stands with blood on his hands, hiding in the wilderness from those who seek his life. Exhausted by this life, he cries out to God "It is enough; now O, Lord, take away my life..."

Even the prophet receiving a direct word from God, has days when life seems like unbearable burden instead of precious gift. It is in the depth of this hopelessness, in this deep sense of despair that God meets Elijah once again.

An angel reaches out and touches Elijah and he is urged to eat the cakes that have been provided on the stones before him. God provides – bread from heaven - and the angel says "Get up and eat otherwise the journey will be too much for you."

Bread from heaven – take and eat or the journey will be too much for you.

Today we continue in a four week series of scripture in which Jesus speaks repetitively "I am the bread of life. I am the bread that came down from heaven... I am the living bread." And today our Elijah text is set alongside Jesus' words.

I wonder how many of us can relate to Elijah these days. We stand in the ugliness of our world. Drought covers our nation. We aren't sure if we should open our windows to stay safe from Covid or close our windows to protect our lungs from the smoke that rises from the parched lands on fire. There is famine. Not enough water for fields and crops, fears of the impact on next year's blossoms and seeds. Food shelf use is at record highs. Rulers are most certainly rising up against rulers in modern form. Battlelines drawn, people villainized identified by party alone. People are desperately seeking answers, turning not to God but to retail therapy, opioids and alcohol, new affections, exercise additions, diets and Netflix bingeing. Voices, in multiplying digital forms, drowned out the voice of the Lord. We witness, even instigate, violence and murderous acts. Fist fights in grocery stores over mask protocols, shooting of strangers across the aisle, domestic violence as stresses come out sideways at loved ones. Do we know the blood on our own hands? We are tired from doing hard things – quarantines and home schooling, new routines and altered plans. We watch as pandemic numbers rise again and the ground beneath our feet shifts once more. Unsettled, uncertain, standing on the edge of wilderness, fearing for our lives and the lives of our children, do the exhausted words of Elijah escape our lips "It is enough, O Lord..."? Are there days when life seems like unbearable

burden instead of precious gift? It is in the depth of this hopelessness, in this deep sense of despair and exhaustion that God promises to meet us once again.

God sends bread from heaven to Elijah. "Take and eat or the journey will be too much for you." Elijah takes and eats the cake more than once. In fact, this is not the first time that God has provided bread from heaven to maintain Elijah on his journey. This will not be the last. By this bread, by God's provision, Elijah finds the strength to live on, to do as God commands, to journey on earth until he ascends to live eternally with God.

God sends us bread from heaven, provision for our journey. Jesus said "I am the bread of life...I am the bread that came down from heaven." Today as we celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion, we will once again hear the words "Take and eat this is my body given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me." Something mysterious happens at the table of the Lord. God meets us in our exhaustion and despair. God provides what we need and nourishes us for our journey. God seems to say, as the angel did to Elijah, "take and eat or the journey will be too much for you." We take this bread from heaven not just once, but over and over again throughout our journey. It is by this bread, by God's provision that we find the strength to live on, to do as God commands, to journey on earth until we ascend to live eternally with God.

We have heard people say "You are what you eat." In communion we celebrate this truth. We become what we receive, what we take in – the body of Christ given for you. It used to be commonly believed that when you consumed part of an animal, it became a part of you. Hence why people didn't eat pig because it was an unclean animal and by taking it into one's body one became unclean oneself. Martin Luther spoke of communion in this way, believing that as we take in the bread of life, the body of Christ, we become "little Christs." As we acknowledge that this journey would be too much for us alone and receive the bread from heaven "the bread given for the life of the world," we are empowered to live in hope and sent as "little Christs" into the world. Christ within us enables us to continue the journey of life, living beyond ourselves for the sake of the world God loves. As our Ephesians text reminds us we are therefore imitators of God and live in love. Through the power of Christ in and through us, we can do hard things such as put away falsehood and speak the truth, not let the sun go down on our anger, keep all evil from our mouths, use our words to build up and give grace to those who hear, put away bitterness and wrath, be tenderhearted and forgiving. For having received the bread from heaven, having been provided for through Jesus, God in the flesh, we do not wait for eternal life after death, we live in God's eternal presence and as God's eternal people now.

Elijah cried out "It is enough; now O Lord, take my life..." God has indeed taken your life into his very being in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the bread of life. Therefore we are freed once again to live in hope. So come and eat, for God knows that otherwise the journey will be too much for you. Receive the bread of life, Christ Godself, and be renewed in the precious gift of life, given and shed for you. Then filled with Christ, go forth to be a little Christ, empowered to do the hard things. Know God's eternal presence and the gift of eternal life already begun even here amidst the ugliness of the world. Taste and see that the Lord is good.