

Yr. B, Proper 14
August 8, 2021
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
1453 Words

Lessons: 1st Kings 19:4-8
Psalm 34:1-8
Ephesians 4:25-5:2
John 6:35, 41-51

The great prophet, Elijah, seemed capable of anything. He performed life-giving miracles. In the chapter previous to the one from which we heard this morning's Old Testament lesson, Elijah performed a breath-taking miracle. Up at Mt. Carmel he showed the magnificent glory of the God of Israel, while completely humiliating 450 prophets of the false god, Baal.

Remember how he taunted them all when Baal did not respond to their prayers? "Your god must be meditating, or maybe he wandered off (to the bathroom)¹, or perhaps he's on a journey or possibly he fell asleep!" Read chapter 18 of the 1st Book of Kings for the full drama.

So, why is Elijah suddenly so afraid of Queen Jezebel? Why doesn't he vanquish her like he just destroyed 450 of her favorite prophets? We don't know, because Elijah runs for his life instead. He fled southward toward Judah.

Today's Old Testament lesson picks up yet another day's journey deeper into the desert. This mighty prophet of Israel found a small patch of shade, and asked God to take his life. But the LORD of hosts refused this simple prayer request of Elijah—the last loyal prophet. God did not answer Elijah's prayer the way Elijah wanted. Imagine that!

Instead, an angel appeared—a messenger with a simple message: "Get up and eat!" Elijah did as he was told, and then he lay back down. The messenger tapped his shoulder again. "Get up and eat (some more) or your journey will be too much for you." Once again, Elijah did as he was told. And the writer of the history of the Kings of Israel tells us that Elijah hiked forty days and forty nights on the strength of that bread and water. Taste and see that the LORD is good.

Don't overlook Elijah's destination, forty days' walk through the wilderness. It's Mt. Horeb, the same mountain Moses climbed to meet God. You see, Elijah is no longer running away from the danger of Queen Jezebel. He is now on the path toward a new future with God. It's a future made possible through the sustenance of living bread and living water. Taste and see that the LORD is good.

I recently experienced a taste of hiking in the desert. If you're going to make it, even a short distance—you need the sustenance of bread and water. Some of you who subscribed to our Instagram posts know that I had a little problem with this during our journey out west this summer. It's kind of embarrassing to admit that in the desert country of Arizona I forgot my water bottle not once, but twice—on the same day!

Halfway through the journey in the drought-ridden plain of southern Idaho, I acquired a shiny, new—insulated—water bottle. It kept the water cool under the hot sun, and I *still* forgot to take it out of the pickup truck from time to time.

So, what do *you* need for your journey that you might be neglecting right now? What do you need to sustain yourself in the next chapter of your life with God? Do you feel like Elijah, ready to give up in some way or another? Do you need an angel—a real, live messenger to say, "Get up and eat!"

¹ Some scholars believe the reference to wandering off clearly implies the urgent need for bodily relief.

Every one of us needs the sustenance of the living bread and living water—through prayer and worship...

- Living Bread that comes from reading and meditating on the holy stories of God and God's people...
- Living Bread that comes from seeking and serving Christ in others...
- from striving for justice and peace the way Jesus described it...
- from getting back up when we fall down (or fall away) and trying again to return to the Way of Love.

Dear people, we must *taste*—in order to see—that the LORD is good!

It is experiential! It is not just a theoretical belief. It is not just a historical fact. It is not just a spiritual phenomenon. Responding to the love of God is something we do with our bodies and souls, together. We're talking about real people on a journey with our real God, in the way of love.

St. Paul painted a picture for the Ephesians of what this journey looks like.

- It means rejecting what is false and deceptive.
- It means speaking the truth.
- It means recognizing that we belong to one another, (and—therefore—we have a responsibility to one another's wellness).

It is acceptable to be angry about injustice, dear people. But anger will not sustain you for the long haul. It easily turns to bitterness, resentment, wrath, and other toxicity that robs us and others of abundant life. So, St. Paul writes, deal with it honestly and resolve it.

As usual, he does not stop there. Don't take what doesn't belong to you, Paul declares. Work honestly. Share generously with people who are in need. Find words *filled with grace* to help build up other people. Be kind, for goodness sake; tender-hearted; and forgiving—just like God in Christ has already forgiven you.

The bottom line is as clear as any bottom line in the whole Bible. Imitate God as if you were children of God...because you are! And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us...an offering and sacrifice to God.

So, here we are at the beginning of a new school year, and a new program year. We all hoped things would get better and easier and safer by now. I sure did when I left on sabbatical six weeks ago. Things are better in some ways. I am thankful that very many of you are fully vaccinated—protected from a virus which is still very deadly for some. But we're not yet able to completely put this whole thing behind us.

Guess what? Neither could Elijah. And he was so loyal to God. He did great and powerful things for the glory of the LORD. And, yet, he still got weary and tired. He still wanted to give up...as we just heard. But God was not done with him. And God is not done with us.

So get up and eat! Eat this living bread of Holy Communion with Christ our LORD...and with one another in this community of St. Peter's.

Join a small group to learn something new that will help you discover more about your faith in God. There are multiple options—Education for Ministry, Sacred Ground, the Women's Bible Study, my bible study, Sunday School, SPY, and Godly Play.

Connect with our Centering Prayer Group, Daughters of the King, those who walk our labyrinth, or the lay Eucharistic visitors for prayer and worship.

Join with others who find many ways to serve Christ on this campus and in Greenville, SC and beyond. Our parish is hungry right now for volunteers...real people of all ages and skills and talents and interests. Ask one of your vestry members how you might help contribute to the mission and ministry of St. Peter's...or ask me!

If you are new here (and even if you're not), please sign up for my welcome/welcome back class scheduled two weeks from now. Come meet some new people, and explore the Holy Scriptures, the Anglican Tradition, and this sweet parish. Bishop Waldo's coming next month, and I want us to have adults as well as youth who want to be welcomed and blessed by their bishop.

In the 16th century, Martin Luther once said to his congregation, "I wish I could get you to pray the way that my dog goes after meat." I wish the same for you—prayer in thought...and in word...and in deed. You've got to taste...in order to see...that the LORD is good.

So, get up! Get up and eat the Bread that came down from heaven for the life of the world...for you and me. We give thanks for it and share it around here just about every day of the week in one way or another. We need the sustenance of our Living Bread and Living Water or the journey will be too much for us...as it would've been for the great prophet, Elijah.

So, consider me to be your angel. I'm your messenger...the one tapping you on the shoulder and saying, "It's time to get up and eat." I'm telling you because I love you. I'm telling you because God loves you. The eternal invitation for all God's children—the believers and the skeptics—is very simple. You've just got to taste in order to see that the LORD is good.

Amen.

Amen.