

FOOD FOR THE ROAD!

Rev. Steven D. Spencer – Pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church
1 Kings 19:1-8 & John 6:35-51

And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you. (1 Kings 19:7)

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. (John 6:51)

Fight or flight. Those are the two primal urges in us. When we are in a tough situation, when we are tested, when we are cornered we either fight or flee. But what happens when you can neither fight nor flee? Our OT text this morning gives a third option, the overlooked option, the one that we don't naturally seek or take: faith.

Elijah fought. He fought 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah who gathered at Mt. Carmel. The challenge: one bull for Baal, one for Yahweh, each on an altar with wood but no fire. 450 prophets would call down fire in the name of Baal; Elijah would do the same in the name of Yahweh. Elijah versus the prophets of Baal in a prophetic smackdown of pay-per-view proportions. The prophets of Baal prayed and danced and cut themselves while Elijah taunted from the sidelines. Nothing. No response, no one answered.

Then Elijah built an altar for the Lord, put the bull on the altar with the wood, and commanded that they soak everything down with water three times. 4 huge water jars, 5 to 6 gallons each, filled to the brim with water and poured on the altar. Now let's do the math. That's 60 to 70 gallons of water. I was a Boy Scout, and let me tell you, water and fire don't mix, unless you're trying to put the fire out. Elijah prays a absolutely bland prayer, "**O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back**" (1 Kings 18:36-37). The prophets of Baal and Asherah they had style, they had panache. Their prayers and actions were dynamic, entertaining, exciting. Lots of noise, lots of action, but nothing happened. Elijah stands in front of the altar, prays his humble prayer and then fire from heaven consumes the bull, consumes the wood, consumes the altar, and everything around it. And the 450 prophets of Baal were rounded up and killed. What a victory it was for Elijah! What a vindication for the Name of Yahweh! No doubt as to who was in charge.

No doubt, that is, until Elijah went back to Jezreel where Queen Jezebel was waiting for him, and she wasn't happy. "I swear to the gods I'm going to do to you what you did to my prophets." And all of a sudden Elijah that great prophet is afraid and flees for his life into the wilderness. Fight or flight. You can fight the false prophets but you can't fight the queen. So you flee for your life.

Victory turned into defeat, so it would seem. The Lord who was so strong, so powerful, so in charge at Mt. Carmel seems to absent in Jezreel. Elijah who singlehandedly defeated 450 false prophets is forced to flee a queen with revenge on her mind. What would you do? Elijah fled. He headed straight for Mt. Horeb, Mt. Sinai, to get a clearer directions from God. It was kind of an Exodus in reverse, from the Promised Land back to Horeb for — yes, you guessed it — forty days and forty nights.

Elijah ditches his servant and goes it alone, a kind of one-man Israel heading in reverse, fleeing from the Promised Land, no longer trusting the power of God to save. Dejected, he curls up under a broom tree (a Juniper tree) and prays to die. "It's enough. I've had it. Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." There's a lot of truth in that. Elijah was no better than his fathers, nor are we. "Chief of sinners" is

what St. Paul called himself, and we dare not confess anything less. We are no better than anyone, whether those who came before or those who will come after. No matter how great the things we might have done, no matter how many battles we've won or kingdoms we've conquered. We are no better than our fathers and we deserve to die. This is most certainly true. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 3:23). We deserve to die! And so did Elijah.

Have you ever feel like Elijah under the broom tree? Have you had one of those days, or weeks, or years where you just wanted to curl up and die? You work, you save, you pray, you expect visible success, some tangible results, a return on your investment. Or you see defeat snatched out of the jaws of victory, and everything you've worked for seems to have fallen apart and come to nothing? That's Elijah. He's run out of fight and he doesn't have much energy for flight left in him. He just wants to die, and if we're honest, so we feel the same way at times? Sometimes we even say it, more or less dramatically, "I just want to die."

In a sense he's absolutely right, you know. We do need to die, each of us. We need to die to ourselves, to our expectations, to our agendas, to all the ways we try to obligate God and hold Him accountable to our expectations. We need to die to our own inner idolatries, all those things we fear, love, and trust in above God. We need to die to all those things that interfere with our worship, with our receiving God's gift, our service of prayer, praise, thanksgiving. We need to die to our sin, to our selves, and to the Law. And we need to rise too. It's not just death but death and resurrection. That's God's way of doing things.

God is gracious, merciful, forgiving and patient. The angel of the Lord, who is in all likelihood Christ pre-incarnate, comes to the discouraged prophet with a word: "**Arise and eat.**" Gracious words, inviting words, Gospel words. Get up. Arise from the death of your slumbers, Elijah. Eat. Be strengthened and nourished. At his head are some freshly baked bread and a jar of water. Bread and water in the wilderness! Just like the manna from heaven and the water from the rock that sustained Israel in the Exodus.

Elijah nibbled and sipped and lay back down again. We do that. We nibble and sip at the gifts of Christ and then go back to sleep. We snack on salvation as though it were popcorn in the theater of life and then go back to our depressed slumbers wondering why nothing has changed. Would we make a greater effort to be in church, if only Jesus would make a grand and glowing appearance occasionally? Would that really change our priorities? What if some grand miracle happened in the Lord's Supper, say, the bread and chalice started glowing with some unearthly glow? Or what if the bread and wine actually appeared as Jesus' body and blood? I'm sure we wouldn't want to eat and drink it, but we'd sure make it a point to be here. Why don't we now? What if Jesus were actually standing here and blessing you with His benediction? Would you come a bit earlier? Stay to the end of every service?

Why don't we do it now? Good question. Maybe it's because we don't believe the Word of Christ. (Turn to the altar) Lord, help Thou our unbelief!

It seems that at the times when we are most in need of the bread of life, of that stream of living water that flows from the cross to us, it's during that time we check out and stay away and nibble when we should be sitting down to a hearty meal. Elijah just had food and drink from heaven plunked down next to his head, and what does he do? He takes a bite and a sip and goes back to sleep.

A second time Christ comes to Elijah and touches him. "**Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.**" Those are good words for your ears too. Arise, discouraged, downtrodden and depressed child of God, get up and eat this bread from heaven given for you. Drink this heavenly wine poured out for you. The journey of your life, your death, your resurrection is too great for you, and without this food, you cannot run the race that is set before you. Without this food and drink you will die in the wilderness of your sin and death. Without this food and drink your faith will shrivel up and die, and you will have only yourself to blame for it.

The Lord isn't for nibbling and sipping, but for eating and drinking, for feasting at a lavish table that never ends. "This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die....If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." "And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Elijah lasted forty days and nights on the strength of that bread and water in the wilderness. Forty days and nights. And that was only a foretaste. Jesus says, "***Whoever feeds on my flesh (this flesh which He gives for the life of the world) and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him***" (John 6:54-55).

Here is true food, a bread which is beyond any bread this world can offer. Here is true drink, a heavenly vintage poured out on the cross. For you to eat and to drink with this promise: "***I will raise you up on the last day.***" Here the fruits of Jesus' death on the cross come flowing to you, they are placed on your tongue as surely as the bread and water next to Elijah's head. There is more than bread and water in this wilderness for you. There is living Bread, the flesh of Christ given for the life of the world. There is heavenly wine, the true Blood of Christ poured out for your sins and your forgiveness. Food and drink in the wilderness that will bring you to your destination and your home with God in Jesus.

The journey is too great for you. Don't try to go without proper nourishment. You won't make it. You can't. Your strength to endure, to conquer, to live is found in Christ alone, whose death and life He has been given to you. Sin and death would have you trapped like a Jezebel out hot threats against Elijah. Remember the Word that conquered the prophets of Baal. Remember the Word that fed the prophet in the wilderness. Remember the Word made flesh who gave His flesh for the life of the world and for you. It's not about fighting or fleeing when it comes to sin, death, devil, the Law, hell or your life. It's not fight or flight. It's faith, trust in the promise, of the Bread of Life who is Jesus.

Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you. Take, eat. This is my Body given for you. Take, drink, this is my Blood poured out for you, for the forgiveness sin. This is food for the journey of life even unto life everlasting. For though Christ and by Him, all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit, in Jesus name, Amen and amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, AMEN.