

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost August 8, 2021

1 Kings 19:4-8

This summer, we've been following the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures; Ezekiel, Amos, Jeremiah, Elisha, Moses, and now- Elijah.

Elijah is a prophet from around 800's BCE who is in conflict with the royal house of Israel over their worship of the Canaanite god Baal. Elijah is an unrelenting voice for worship of YHWH- the Hebrew God- alone. He also insists that an expression of that worship of God alone is social justice. Much like other prophets of Israel. We've heard this tune before, haven't we?

The chapter in our reading today comes after a great victory for Elijah on Mt. Carmel over the worshippers of Baal. Up to this point Elijah has confronted a powerful king and accused him of sin. He has brought about miracles through prayer, called down fire from heaven. Elijah is faithful, confident, and authoritative. He is bold in his proclamation of the worship of God alone, even in the face of great danger.

Yet, after all this, when Queen Jezebel threatens his life for his victory at Mt Carmel, Elijah runs away to the wilderness. And it is here, in the wilderness- that desolate place where Jesus is

tempted, where the Israelites wandered, - here Elijah sits under the broom tree, exhausted, angry, afraid, and asks that he might die. Then, he falls asleep.

Later, Elijah is awakened by an angel to find bread and water near him, "Eat," he is told. So, Elijah eats, and drinks then lays down to sleep again. Once again, the angel comes and wakes him and says for him to eat and drink or the journey may be too much for him.

What is going on here? Theologian Joy Clarkson has a twitter post going around that says, "This is your gentle reminder that one time in the bible Elijah was like, "God, I'm so mad! I want to die!" so God said, "Here's some food. Why don't you have a nap?" So, Elijah slept, ate, and decided things weren't so bad. Never underestimate the spiritual power of a nap and a snack." She's not wrong.

Do any of you recognize Elijah's mental state? He's just expended all this energy fighting the good fight and even after his victory against all these opponents- it's almost like nothing changed. He's back at square one. And now here he is exhausted, in danger, overwhelmed and burned out. Ready to quit, "Take me now, Lord!"

I would imagine many of us are feeling these things right now. Tired for no apparent reason, tempers a little shorter, anxious with the rise in Covid cases, being drawn back into making decisions about masking or not masking, vaccinations, school, eating indoors, fighting with insurance companies over derecho repairs. Trying to find employees, trying to find work, trying to find day care. Ready to just throw up our hands and quit.

I'm not surprised by the rise in unruly passengers on airplanes, customers in stores, conflict with neighbors that quickly escalates. Friends, recognize it or not, all of us have been traumatized by the pandemic we are still living in and while they are not always helpful, these feelings and emotions are natural.

After the 2008 floods the Rev. Michael Stadie of Lutheran Disaster Response came to speak to local rostered leaders and he put up this chart and said, "Let me tell you what is going to happen. You're all in the honeymoon phase. You've fought off the flood waters and started to rebuild already and everyone thinks things will be back to normal in just a few weeks. Because look what we just did together. We can do this if we just work hard enough. But it won't happen. There will be this emotional crash as people realize the devastation was too big, the resources to recover too small to do so with any speed. There will be

recovery, but it will take time- probably years- and there will be set-backs.

People will get frustrated, angry, upset, depressed. You will see a rise in domestic abuse and mental health issues. You will see a rise in conflict and all of your political leadership will be gone by the next election, regardless of how well they performed.” This kind of phenomenon has been observed and studied for years and while the details change, the general shape stays the same.

Friends, we have been through one of the most traumatic and widespread events since the 1918 Flu Pandemic. And it is not done with us yet, even if we are done with it. Even if Covid never sickened or killed anyone in our immediate orbit, we have all been touched by it. We have been adapting and deciding for ourselves, our families, and sometimes our businesses and church, about what risks we feel comfortable taking and trying to discern what those risks really are. Adapting to changing circumstances and recommendations as new things have been discovered about this novel virus. Change has been almost constant.

How do you feel? Are you tired? Overwhelmed? Stressed? Ready to just throw up your hands and say, “Take me now, Lord!”

It's natural to feel that way. And just imagine those in the medical profession- nurses, doctors, techs, hospital staffs who have all been faced with those and even more difficult decisions. Who have seen the worst of this pandemic from the beginning. Every day.

Note what God does not do when Elijah has his outburst. God does not say, "Suck it up buttercup! Get back to work!" Instead, God lets him vent, rest, and eat. Only then does God call Elijah to the next part of the journey, and even then, it doesn't mean get back to work, rather it is even more time to process what has happened and discern what the next part of his call will be. More time off before returning to that work.

So, my friends, I invite you, I give you permission, I beg you, to acknowledge those places in your life where you are tired, where you are mad, or disappointed, or hurt, or confused, or scared. There is healing in just giving voice to those things that we are feeling. And having affirmed that it is okay to feel that way. Even as we work to keep those emotions from guiding us to destructive action, towards ourselves or others.

I invite you to stop and rest. To find a wilderness place away from all the news and pressure. A place of quiet, so you can slow down. Breathe. Sleep. We need sleep, to function well and to

deal with even the normal stress of life. Without good sleep, we have even more difficulty with memory, mood, concentration, our immune system is weakened, and there is increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, weight gain. God built in us amazing capacity, but it is not healthy to always be living at the edge of that capacity. That is not the life fuller and more abundant God calls us to.

I invite you to eat. Regular and healthy meals. Because without these basics of sleep and food, I fear the journey will be too much for you.

I also invite you to rest in God's arms. To experience the peace of laying aside your burdens, trusting that God will care for them, and be fed spiritually as well. To hear clearly God's desire for you to live a life full and abundant. ""Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Jesus says. Lay aside those burdens you have been carrying. Place them on Jesus. It might even be helpful to say so, "Lord, I'm tired of carrying this- you take it awhile, would you?" Then eat and rest, you can always take it up again later if you must, but I would guess if you do you will find it to be lighter or even to find it is no longer a burden.

Come, my friends, rest in Jesus who brings a peace beyond what even the most restorative sleep can bring. Rest in him through prayer and scripture.

I invite you to come and eat. Come to this table and receive the very Body and Blood of Jesus. Receive within yourself the life of Christ come for you. Come, taste and see that the Lord is good! Come, for in this meal you will be strengthened for the journey ahead. Come, with all your hurt and disappointment and pain. Come and receive all that you need- rest, mercy, a balm for our wounds, and the love of God that overwhelms everything else.