

August 12, 2018

I Kings 19:1-8:

“The Journey Is Too Great for You”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the chapter before our Old Testament lesson for this morning we have the well-known account of the prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel. This account shares the dramatic victory of Elijah against 450 prophets of Baal. He challenges the people to stop wavering between two opinions and to reject Baal and cling only to the Lord. He suggests a contest. He says that a sacrifice should be prepared and that the real God must come and consume it by fire. The people like the idea fully aware that Baal is responsible for lightening as well as rain, so this should be easy for him.

The 450 prophets of Baal do everything to get Baal to consume their sacrifice by fire, even destroying the other altar made for the Lord, but there is no answer. Elijah rebuilds the altar of the Lord, now damaged by the frantic Baal worshipers. He then soaks it with water to remove any doubt about the miracle that will soon occur. When he prays for the fire to fall, he asks the Lord to remind the people that he is the covenant God of Israel - their only Savior. Fire falls without delay and consumes the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil, and also licks up the water in the trench. It is no wonder that the people cry out, "The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!" Elijah then supervises the execution of the 450 prophets of Baal.

After these things, our lesson tells us that "Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.' Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there (1 Kings 19:1-3)."

Isn't that the Christian life? The happening on Mount Carmel was amazing. It was a resurrection of an already stressed-out prophet and the wavering people of Israel. We too can find ourselves stressed and wavering, and then touched by the means of grace, which is the presence of Christ in our lives. We are raised in him as our sins are forgiven, and we have the strength to face and do anything. But as quickly as it comes, so does it go. The Jezebel's come into our lives and turn everything upside down and we are afraid and running. Just like the prophet Elijah we are in the middle of the great things of our Lord, and then, like the snap of finger, we feel like it's all gone and we are doomed.

Look at poor Elijah. Our text says: "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.' And he lay down and slept under a broom tree." Alone, at night, under this broom tree, Elijah poured out his heart to God. The prophet was disappointed, discouraged, and depressed. More than that! He wanted to die!

Have you ever felt like that? There are others in the New Testament that felt exactly like Elijah did. The apostle Paul writes: "For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death (1 Corinthians 1:8-9a)." I think that Paul really brings out

the proper understanding of those moments when things are so bad that we want to die. Paul says that he and his companions felt that they had received “the sentence of death.” I believe that we are not given the reasons why they felt this way so that we are enabled to put ourselves into the text with Paul and his companions. Do you ever feel so utterly burdened that you cannot cope with it, or find a way out? It can be the consequences of a messed up creation, the gnawing of your sinful flesh, the thinking and pressures of this unbelieving world, or the accusations of the devil who would have you to believe that God has abandoned you. In those moments, when **The Journey Is Too Great For You**, what do you do?

Paul goes on to say, “Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again (2 Cor. 1:9-10).” As you can see, when **The Journey Is Too Great For You**, and it is always too great for you, the Lord would teach you - would teach us - to “rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.” We say it all the time in the liturgy: “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Psalm 124:8).” He can raise the dead! What is that we often say? “I wish I were dead.” God raises the dead!

At the time, Elijah wasn't quite where Paul was when he wrote 2 Corinthians, but he was in learning what Paul had been taught by God. And, make no mistake about it, it is a lesson that we all have to repeatedly learn, for even Paul says that “on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.” Back to the point. Elijah was learning. It says in 1 Kings 19 that Elijah

lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 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.**” And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

We also must learn the lesson that our hope (our anticipation of deliverance) is strengthened into a hope that hopes when it seems that all is hopeless. In verse 7 of our text we learn that it was “the angel of the Lord” who twice said “Arise and eat” and gave Elijah “a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water.” It was through the word of the angel of the Lord and what he gave to Elijah that gave him the strength to travel for forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God. From what we learn from other passages of the Bible, this “angel (messenger) of the Lord” is the pre-incarnate Son of God. This is Jesus before what was written of him in John 1:1, “the Word became flesh.”

With the angel of the Lord and the food that was given, Elijah was able to travel for “forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God.” We also are traveling through our “forty days and forty nights” through a wilderness where we may feel utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despair of life. But as Jesus was tempted in the wilderness with our forty days and forty nights, and overcame for us all the way to the cross, he proved to be our only source of strength to make it through everything in this life. As Jesus (the angel of the Lord) came to Elijah and said: “Arise and eat, for the journey is too much for you,” so

does he say the same to us. It is through Jesus' miraculous intervention, his presence, his words, and what he gives in "a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water" that gives Elijah the ability to travel to the mountain of God. In this we are to know and believe that God raises the dead through his Son who died and rose for us.

This same truth is in our Gospel lesson for this morning when Jesus says to some of the 5,000 who were fed in their wilderness journey (John 6:35-40):

"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

The 5,000 in the wilderness had Jesus, loaves of bread and fish. In the passage that I have just read, Jesus makes it clear that the feeding of the 5,000 was not about filling bellies. He lumps the whole experience into a spiritual reality that they may know that the miracle he performed with bread and fish are about his cross and empty tomb. Jesus is the bread of life. He is the bread that raises us up from the dead. He is the only thing that helps us in the moments when we say with Elijah, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

Whoever believes in Jesus will neither hunger or thirst. He is the cure for our starvation - our burdens and despair. He says to us "arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you but not for me, and I will carry you to the mountain of God." If we would see the last day and be raised unto eternal life, the Holy Spirit must create and preserve our faith in Jesus. In this faith we "arise and eat." The Holy Spirit gives us the food of Scripture (the voice of Christ), serves us water that cleanses us from every sin, and prepares a feast that is the body and blood of Jesus. **The Journey is Too Great For You . . .** unless you have Jesus . . . therefore, "arise and eat!"

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott