

August 8, 2021

1 Kings 19:1-8

“In the Strength of That Food!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I read an article the day I wrote this sermon where a landscaper saw a man in his car having a seizure. He ran up to the rolling car and apparently stopped it in a homeowner's lawn. The windows were up and the doors locked. The landscaper began yelling for others to help him which prompted the homeowners to reportedly come out of their house and yell at the landscaper. "Get off our lawn. Get the man out of here, have him die somewhere else." The landscaper was able to somehow determine where the injured man lived and ran to the home to alert his wife and the police. The man survived.

When I read that article I had one of those "I've had enough moments." It seems that lately I've been having a lot of those. I guess the incessant dripping of the water of what's going on in society is beginning to wear the rock of me out. Despite the heroics of the landscaper I could only hear the words of the homeowners, "... have him die somewhere else." My mind traveled to the words of the apostle Paul, where he writes (1 Tim. 3:1-5): "... in the last days there will come times of difficulty ... people will be lovers of themselves ... heartless ... brutal ..." You want to talk about a pandemic? We are in a pandemic where the septic lids have been removed from the hearts that beat without Jesus and his self-sacrifice and forgiveness at the cross.

But then I thought about my own sinful nature - my own septic tank. What about my own contributions to the stink of the last days - loving the self and even moments where I have been heartless and brutal? It is always much easier to condemn those around us instead of examining ourselves isn't it? And it occurred to me that it is unwise to say that such things have never been before our time. They certainly have and have been worse than what I read in the article. Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes (7:10): "Say not, 'Why were the former days better than these?' For it is not from wisdom that you ask this." The heart without Christ is always a septic tank in every generation, and there even remains one in every Christian as well. Thanks be to God for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ!

Perhaps the question revolves around the placement of the lids on the septic tanks of human hearts and how much of the stink is now wafting in the air. Right now there is quite a stink. But rather than wasting a lot of time trying to measure and compare it with the past stink we should be doing at least two things. First, the stink should be pointing us to the truth that the smell is far too great for us to handle - as the old expression says: "it can gag a maggot." Secondly, only God is going to be able to deal with the stink and get us through it. Only the sweet fragrance of the gospel of Jesus and his cross is going to do it.

That brings us to the prophet Elijah. After the amazing and miraculous events at Mount Carmel we find the prophet Elijah afraid and running for his life. The stink was getting to him. Queen Jezebel wanted him dead - dead for doing what was right - dead for proclaiming the Lord and the only sacrifice for sins. Being afraid like Elijah can do a lot of damage. And there appears to be much to be afraid of in our society today with so many septic tank lids having been removed. We can try to get away from it all like Elijah, but doing so will take its toll to even the point that we find ourselves with him underneath a broom tree only to say: "I have had enough, Lord. Take my life!" We are told that Elijah fell asleep. He was worn out. Walter A. Maier III, writes in his commentary on *1 Kings 12-22*:

Elijah's discouragement, despondency, and desire for death are due in part to his incorrect judgment, mis-perception, failure to see everything, and thinking that his plan for the Northern Kingdom was the only way. Yet it was wrong for him to fall into such a condition. The Psalms exhort believers to "praise Yah(weh)" (Pss 146:1; 147:1; 148:1; 149:1; 150:1) as long as they are alive and whatever their circumstances (Ps 148:11-14).

Please keep in mind that Elijah's "I've had enough moment" was after a dramatic defeat of false gods at Mount Carmel. This was after a huge victory for Elijah with every reason to praise the Lord. So it is with us. We have the cross and empty tomb and look at how little it takes to suck the life out of us in such a brief moment. When septic tank lids are ripped off and the horrible stink pushes against the sweet fragrance of the gospel, look at how fast we become afraid to the point of giving up. In moments like these we discover something about ourselves. We can't make it on our own. The journey is always too great for us, just as it was too great for the prophet Elijah. We look for a broom tree instead of God to find cover. It's like that moment when we were children and we pulled the bedcovers over our eyes because we wanted what was scary to go away because we were unable to manage it. Our Old Testament lesson says:

And behold, an angel touched him [Elijah] 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.

The Lord is tender to Elijah. He sees his physical and emotional state and touches his life twice and gives him a double portion of food to strengthen him in his journey so that he may reach the mount of God. The love and undeserved kindness of the Lord is great. He sees our predicament and he does something about it. He will give us what we need. The Lord is tender toward us. And Elijah arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to the mount of God, where incidently, God tells him to go back and face what he was fleeing.

There are four things that we want to emphasize in this text. First, what is important about the food is not what it was but from where it came. This is the Lord's food that is given to Elijah. Secondly, it is not merely food that is given, but a food that comes with the touch of the messenger of the Lord and with his word to arise and eat. Here the Lord is touching him, speaking to him, feeding him and making it clear that without him the journey is too great. From what we learn from other passages of the Bible, the "angel [messenger] of the Lord" is the pre-incarnate Son of God. This was Jesus before he became a man. Finally, Elijah goes in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights. He makes it through.

The expression - "forty days and forty nights" - further confirms that this is Jesus with Elijah, for there is none other who has overcome the forty days and forty nights for us other than him. This expression is repeatedly used in Scripture as a period of time where someone must go through a trial in preparation to reach a destination. We cannot make it through the forty days and forty nights by our own power and

strength. Our forty days and forty nights can only be endured by faith in the one who has gone through the forty days and forty nights for us. This is Jesus. He must repeatedly touch us, speak to us, and feed us a double portion to get us through.

Brothers and Sisters, today we are living our own forty days and forty nights. This journey is far too great for us, as we are seeing by our many “I’ve had enough moments.” We can’t handle the last days by escaping and lying down underneath a broom tree. There is no escape of our own making. We must boldly make the journey, but that journey can only be boldly made through Jesus and what he gives to us through his life, sufferings and death, and empty tomb.

After his resurrection, Christ appeared to his disciples over a period of forty days before he ascended into heaven to strengthen them. He also promised that he would be with them and us always to the very end of the age. Being that we are at the end of the age, the only solution to the “I’ve had enough moments,” and our desire to sleep under the broom tree, is found in the touch of Jesus, his speaking to us in the Bible, and the food that he gives in the Sacrament to strengthen us on our journey so that we may reach the destination. We can only make the journey in the sustenance of the means of grace - the Word and Sacraments - the place where Jesus is with us. We are only going to be able to make it **“In the Strength of That Food!”**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott