

1 Kings 19:1-8 (Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 14—Series B)

“Strengthened By the Food God Provides”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

August 8, 2021

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the Old Testament lesson recorded in 1 Kings 19:

¹And Ahab told to Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²And Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, “So may the gods do to me and more if I do not, by this time tomorrow, make your life like the life of one of them.” ³When he saw that, he arose, and ran for his life and came to Beer-Sheba, which belongs to Judah, and he left his servant there. ⁴And he went into the wilderness a day's journey and he came and sat down under a broom tree and he asked that he would die, and he said, “Enough! Now, O Yahweh, take my life because I am no better than my fathers.” ⁵And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold! This angel was touching him and was saying to him, “Arise; eat.” ⁶And he looked and behold! there was at his head a round flat loaf baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and he lay down again. ⁷And the angel of Yahweh returned a second time and touched him and said to him, “Arise. Eat, for the journey is too much for you.” ⁸And he arose and ate and drank and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

Elijah had been to the mountaintop, literally. But now he was down in death valley.

How quickly the situation changed! One moment, Elijah was at the top of it all. Yahweh and the Canaanite god Baal had duked it out. Actually, it wasn't much of a contest. Being a fake god, Baal never showed up that day on Mt. Carmel, a mountain due west of the Sea of Galilee on the Mediterranean coast. Oh, his priests tried to call upon him to bring down fire to consume their sacrifice. They danced around like a bunch of crazy people, cutting themselves to appease their deity. But nothing happened. Elijah watched all the commotion and made fun of them around noontime, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened” (1 Ki. 18:27 ESV). But nothing ever happened. Baal never answered. But Yahweh did.

Elijah stood before his water-drenched altar, the wood, the stones, the sacrifice water-logged and dripping profusely. He prayed, “O Yahweh, 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 Yahweh, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Yahweh, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.' Then the fire of Yahweh fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, 'Yahweh, he is God; Yahweh, he is God.' And Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.' And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there" (1 Ki. 18:36-40).

The 450 prophets of Baal met their end with the judgment of God in their execution. Elijah was on top of the mountain, used by Yahweh to show the people that He alone is the only real God. It was a big win for the Lord! Elijah was flying high! But then Queen Jezebel put out the death warrant on Elijah. She swore an oath when she learned that the prophets of Baal had been killed, "So may the gods do to me and more if I do not, by this time tomorrow, make your life like the life of one of them." Wanted: Elijah the prophet. Dead, not alive.

Now suddenly finding himself no longer on top of the world but in death valley, Elijah got out of the Kingdom of Israel. He went to the farthest city in the southern-most part of the Kingdom of Judah. It seems he was crushed. He was devastated. It was a huge victory for the Lord, but now he's under the sentence of death by the queen of Israel. A day's journey into the wilderness south of the Kingdom of Judah, Elijah lay down under a 10-12-foot-high broom tree, the only one in the area. "Enough! Now, O Yahweh, take my life because I am no better than my fathers."

We get some insight into Elijah's thinking in the verses following our Old Testament text today. When Elijah was at Mt. Horeb, also known as Mt. Sinai of the Ten Commandments fame, Yahweh had a conversation with His servant. The Word of Yahweh came to him. I've capitalized "Word" to indicate that it's not simply a spoken, audible word, but the eternal Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son. This is the very Word of God who would, in centuries to come, take on human flesh and dwell among us as Jesus the Incarnate Son of God. But now God the Son comes to Elijah in a form that Elijah can see and relate to and asks, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah tells Him, "I have been very jealous for Yahweh, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Ki. 19:10).

Elijah was discouraged. He was afraid. He felt totally alone in the mission to preach to the people so that they might hear God's Word and be brought to repentance and faith in Yahweh again as their Redeemer. But the Son of God reveals something to Elijah at Mt. Horeb that he didn't know. But I'll come to that in a minute. There is another answer to the question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" that we need to address.

The Word of Yahweh would not be speaking with Elijah on this mountain had He not touched and spoken to Elijah in the wilderness. From our reading, Elijah "lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold! This angel was touching him and was saying to him, 'Arise; eat.' And he looked and behold! there was at his head a round flat loaf baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and he lay down again. And the angel of Yahweh returned a second time and touched him and said to him, 'Arise. Eat, for the journey is too

much for you.’ And he arose and ate and drank and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.”

The Word of Yahweh is the Angel of Yahweh is God the Son. God the Son set Elijah up to bring Him to Mt. Horeb in order to share some good news with the worn-out prophet. And so He provided food for Elijah in the wilderness. Now wait a minute! Hasn't He done this before, fed people in the wilderness with bread, the manna? Oh yes! Will God the Son feed another crowd of people in the wilderness with bread? Yes, and with fish! They will all eat to the full and be satisfied because the Son of God-made-flesh would provide the food for them and would then teach His people that He is the true bread that came down from heaven in order to give life to the world. We heard in John 6, "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 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" (Jn. 6:48-51 ESV).

In the strength of physical food, Yahweh brought Elijah to the mountain again. Then the Word of Yahweh spoke Gospel, good news, to his prophet, "Elijah, you are most certainly not alone. I have seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Ki. 19:18). Seven thousand! So Elijah is strengthened by the Gospel Word spoken by God the Son who is the Word of Yahweh. Elijah is encouraged and made ready again to take up his commission to return to his God-given ministry. By the food of bread and by the nourishment of the Word, Elijah returns and serves the Triune God until he is taken up into heaven in a whirlwind in 2 Kings chapter 2.

Elijah needed the strength that God provided both physically and spiritually. Elijah received real, tangible, edible food. He also received God's grace and encouragement, a new life, if you will, so that he might return to ministry. Now, we've spent a lot of time with Elijah this morning. What is there in this text for us? We, too, need the strength that God provides for us, both real and tangible things for the here and now and His grace and new life for now and forever.

The one, true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, provides us our "daily bread." We confess that He is our Creator and Preserver and that we are His creatures. Martin Luther reminds us in the *Large Catechism* that the Triune God "has given and constantly preserves . . . for me my body, soul, and life, my members great and small, all my senses, reason, and understanding, and so on. He gives me food and drink, clothing and support, wife and children, domestic servants, house and home, and more. Besides, He causes all created things to serve for the uses and necessities of life. These include the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens, day and night, air, fire, water, earth, and whatever it bears and produces. They include birds and fish, beasts, grain, and all kinds of produce. . . . They also include whatever else there is for bodily and temporal goods, like good government, peace, and security" (Large Catechism).¹ The very God who provided bread in the wilderness for His ancient people, who gave to Elijah food in the desert, who multiplied loaves and fish and fed the thousands continues to provide for all of our physical needs as well so that we might be

¹ Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 400.

strengthened to serve the Lord in our vocations as father, mother, son, daughter, employer, and employee.

The Word of Yahweh who comforted Elijah with good news also provides His Gospel for us. The Word who took to Himself a real human body and soul allowed Himself to suffer death and hell on a cross so that all people might receive the forgiveness of sins by grace through faith in Him. Jesus said, "The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51). And on the cross, He did. He gave His flesh into death and commended His soul into the hands of the Father as He died. Jesus died so that you and I and all who live by faith in the Son of God will live forever. But the Gospel doesn't end with Jesus' death, for there must also be the resurrection of the Son of God. As Jesus lives, so we too shall live a new life in the forgiveness of sins looking forward to resurrection life in body and soul forever and ever. That's the Gospel—Jesus the Son of God, the Son of Man, crucified and risen for the forgiveness of your sins unto life everlasting.

It is in the strength and power of the Gospel Word that we live new lives of faith with forgiveness and eternal life. The Angel of Yahweh, the Word of Yahweh, Jesus the Son bids us, "Arise! Eat." At His bidding then we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Scriptures. Jesus the Son invites us, "Arise! Eat!" And so He prepares a table before us of bread and wine with His Word of command and institution so that we truly eat and drink His body and blood with the bread and wine in the Holy Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins, for life and salvation, and for the strengthening of our faith so that we might live in this world in the strength that God provides in His Son, in His Word, in His Sacrament.

Perhaps as we visit with Elijah today we might exclaim, "Yahweh has done it again!" Our God provides the physical things that we need to strengthen us for living and for serving Him. Our God provides forgiveness of sins through the hearing of the Word and through eating and drinking the body and blood of Jesus so that we have eternal life and are rescued and redeemed from death and the devil's power. Yes, what Yahweh offers to you and me here in Word and Sacrament is strength, the power of the Gospel unto salvation, so that we can go back out into the world in the strength of God and live ever more faithful lives of love and service to others. For the journey of life is too much for us, so come and eat to full and be satisfied. For the flesh of the Son of God is true food, and His blood is true drink (John 6:56). Go, then, in peace in the strength of this heavenly food of Word and Supper. Amen.