**1 KINGS 19:1-8**

**STRENGTHENED FOR THE JOURNEY**

Elijah saw Jezebel as more threatening than her husband King Ahab. Threatened with some sort of painful death Elijah forgets about what God has done for him in the past, the past being just yesterday. Elijah had just defeated 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah in a sacrificial showdown. Of course, it was the Lord God who had won that battle against the other gods of Jezebel, but now Elijah takes his eyes of faith off of God and he looks upon Jezebel in fear, and he flees for his life. He not only leaves the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but he goes all the way down to the Southern most city of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. And even that’s not far enough away. From there, Elijah travels alone into a desert place – the wilderness.

Elijah has had enough of being a prophet and all the challenges that come along with speaking God’s Word to God’s rebellious people. The Lord God had just given him what any faithful prophet would call his greatest triumph, which was followed by one little death threat, and he loses faith and runs.

At Elijah’s request the Lord had sent fire from heaven to consume a water-soaked sacrifice right in front of the false prophets and rebellious people. Some days I long for some little sign from God to wake people up and return them to the Lord. Elijah got fire from heaven. The people saw this fire and fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.” Then the people rounded up the 850 false prophets and killed them. For that day at least, Elijah was king of the prophets. (18:39-40)

However, that was yesterday, and things can change quickly. Jezebel sent Elijah a message that by this time tomorrow he would be as dead as her beloved prophets. And so Elijah ran, out of the country, and into the desert, and he lay down to die saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”

Now did Elijah want to die because Jezebel threatened his life, or because he had become too tired of fighting battles for God? Or maybe it was because he now felt unworthy because he ran away instead of staying and fighting for God. He had endured years of deprivation, isolation, hunger and being hunted, and now he’s ready to give up.

To hear that might shock people. After his defeat of the false prophets and false gods he would seem to be a hero, a success, and yet looking at himself he feels like a failure. And so he tells God that he has had enough.

Have you ever felt that like. People think all is well with your life, and they treat you that way, and yet on the inside you’re hurting. People don’t know what it’s like from the inside of your body. You tell them, but after awhile they forget about your pains or sorrows, and think all is okay with you, and show you no care or concern. They pass you by, and all is not okay, and it hurts to be discarded by family or friends who don’t understand your struggles whether that be financial debt or loneliness. “Why complain, nobody is going to listen anyways?” has become our refrain.

Thus, because others forget about us in our times of struggle and sorrow, it’s easy for us to forget about our LORD during our hard times, or think He has forgotten about us. If those closest to us won’t care, why would God care? But He did care about Elijah. He sent him an angel to feed and strengthen him. Think back to our Psalm for the day. “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them” (34:6-7).

It isn’t only Elijah whom our LORD cares about and sends the help of angels to. He cares about each and every one of us, and sends each and every one of us help, each and every day. Now what might that help be? Think of our Gospel reading and then make the connection to our reading about Elijah.

In our Gospel Jesus said, “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” (John 6:48-51).

That doesn’t sound real, does it? Eat bread and live forever, not die. Now set aside for the moment that this bread is the flesh of Jesus, and all the questions of how that can be, and consider His words. He talks about the manna that people ate during the Exodus through the wilderness to the Promised Land. They had to gather enough to eat each day, not more for tomorrow, just enough for today, except for the day before the Sabath and then they would have enough for two days.

Two days of food we can understand. The miracle of our reading may not have even registered in your mind when you heard it earlier because this one is unbelievable. Elijah “arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights” (19:8). Elijah journeyed for forty days on a little bread and water that he ate on the first day of his journey.

How that could be possible? How is manna in the wilderness for forty years possible? How is it possible for the LORD God to send fire from heaven and consume a water-soaked sacrifice? How is it possible for God to send His Son to people for them to sacrifice Jesus, and that in some way pays for our sins so that we can be forgiven and go to heaven? How is it possible for a little water and a few words spoken in a Baptism to make someone a child of God? How is it possible to eat the flesh of Jesus and live forever?

There’s much in the Bible that we can wonder at how it could be possible. And yet the Christian faith is not about the possible. Faith is reading the Word of God, and as Pastor Rod Rosenbladt said, “Saluting, and saying yes Sir”. Faith is not about asking or explaining how.

A pastor’s role is to tell you what the Bible says, not to explain it. At times there are explanations, and yet when there are none the pastor has to learn to say, “I do not know”. That’s a hard thing for pastors and all Christians alike to say, “I do not know”, and yet that’s what faith is.

How did Elijah live for forty days on a little bread and water that he ate on day one? I don’t know? What I do know is that forty is a symbolic number in the Bible that stands for a long time. It could’ve been 52 days, or 30 days. I don’t know, but it wasn’t something simple like four days without food or water. Elijah lived for forty days on one day of bread and water and that’s good enough for me.

In various places the Bible talks about eating the Word of God (Ezekiel 3:1-2). We have a prayer at the end of our Divine Service based on this. “Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest God’s Word.” The Word of God is one form of the Bread of Life for you to live on and to be strengthened by for your journey. The other is the Lord’s Supper where you eat and drink the true body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith for your journey out into your daily life for the week.

However, now your journey may look too long or hard for you. Forty days, try forty months. You may feel like saying you’ve had enough. Thoughts have come to many of you, and I’ve heard them. “Oh, we’ll never get another pastor”. How do you know that?

I don’t know what lies ahead of me joining the LCMS. Some have told me that I’m making a big mistake. Why such negativity? Are you feeling like Elijah, ready to go off by yourself, lie down, and pray for the LORD to take your life?

You’ve received the Bread of Life today in the Word of God. The LORD will strengthen you for the journey that lies ahead of you whether that be for forty days, or longer. You may be blessed with another pastor in a couple of months, or you may have to call a candidate from the seminary next year. Whether sooner or later I don’t know, God knows. And while you wait on the LORD you have Pastor Kim as your vacancy pastor. You have the Word of God, and the Lord’s Supper. So I say to you, ‘Arise and eat this Bread of Life every day, because without it the journey is too great for you.’ Amen.