

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 16, 2015
1 Kings 19:3-8
The LORD is our Strength in Days of Discouragement
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Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Some believers used to put plastic saints on the dashboards of their cars. You don't see that so much anymore. Others put concrete statues of saints in their flower beds. More prevalent, is turning historical believers in God into unrealistic strawmen. "Who could live such a perfect and heroic faith as they lived," goes the argument.

People in the Bible are real. They had real temptations and failures that attacked them. They had God's real strength that took care of them in those times. God's strength gave them real trust and real hopes for tomorrow.

Such was the prophet Elijah. Elijah spoke God's Word during one of the darkest periods of the northern kingdom's history. Elijah had his days of discouragement in which the LORD strengthened him. You and I can expect nothing different from ourselves or from our God.

The LORD is Our Strength in Days of Discouragement. Elijah shows us people in the Bible are real. Failures neither disqualify nor excuse us from service. Internal resources are no help, only God.

When I say that Elijah shows us people in the Bible are real, I do not mean they actually existed. You and I take as truth that from Adam to the Apostle Paul, these people actually lived and died. By "real" I mean they had flesh and blood with a totally depraved human nature. I mean the sins of the flesh tempted them, and sometimes got the better of them for the moment.

Elijah became discouraged because it seemed as if his life and work were for naught. Yes, the LORD had fed him and others with miracles. Yes, through him the LORD had exposed Baal and his prophets for the frauds they were. Yes, Elijah remained faithful to the one true God.

What had all that faithfulness gotten him? Jezebel, the wicked wife of arguable Israel's most wicked king, Ahab, had killed all the other prophets with the sword. Jezebel had sent this message to Elijah, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." [19:2]

Now, Elijah sat down under a broom tree and prayed to God, "Take my life." [4] Discouraged, disheartened and down in the dumps, Elijah just wanted to die, and in the meantime, to sleep. This is a real person, isn't it? Maybe you have experienced those same sins. Elijah was a real person just like us. Elijah and you and I are not plastic or strawmen, always perfect and heroic in our faith. The sins of discouragement, lack of heart, and those blue days of self-pity attack. At times, they even get the better of us for the moment, just like Elijah.

We are quick to note, however, that the LORD, and notice the Tetragrammaton, did not take Elijah's life because the LORD did not want Elijah to stop his faithful work. Elijah's and our sins and failures neither disqualify nor excuse us from service to our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Savior the four capital letters of LORD point ahead to.

That is the sin often behind our sin of discouragement isn't it? I have been faithful but God has not let everything go my way. Now I have an excuse no longer to put myself through the time consuming, energy draining, and unappreciated work I do for my family, my coworkers, my church, and for my Savior. Failures do not disqualify us or excuse us. That is true for us whom

like Elijah God has called into the public ministry. It is true for all of you whom God has called to offer yourselves as living sacrifices to use your gifts to serve Christ.

We will suffer crosses of rejection and maybe even threat. Others will not always appreciate and maybe even challenge our service. Those attacks can lead to days of discouragement. The journey is too much for us. So, what is the answer?

The answer does not lie in us. God wants us to understand that internal resources are no help, only him. That is even why God permits opposition. It brings us to the quick and certain understanding that the journey is too much for me. I can't do it on my own. There is no shame in admitting I do not have the strength to serve God faithfully. Then I realize the LORD is our strength in days of discouragement.

One of God's created angels came and fed Elijah to give him strength. Elijah recognized this help from God and "got up and ate and drank." [8] This is important for us. We are to use all we need to sustain our bodies and lives that God provides us through our daily bread. Once strengthened, Elijah "traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the Word of the LORD came to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" [8]

The Word of the LORD that came to Elijah on Horeb, also called Mt. Sinai, was what helped the prophet. God spoke to Elijah not in the wind, not in an earthquake, not in the fire, but in a gentle whisper. The LORD whispered a promise of Elijah's deliverance from his enemies, and the assurance that Elijah was not alone. The LORD had preserved seven thousand other believers in Israel. Elijah's work had not been in vain and God told him to continue it. Elijah did continue now strengthened by God's Word.

Internal resources are not help for us, only God. We have no inner resources for strength. God speaks to us to strengthen us not in great and mighty wonders but in the quiet whisper of his Holy Word, the Bible. We receive the strength of Jesus Christ our Savior who has overcome all our enemies, even death. We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength. Our Redeemer and Lord, Jesus Christ, is the strength of my heart and my and our portion forever, the Psalm writer declares in one of my favorite Psalms, Psalm 73. Our labor in the Lord is not in vain as the Holy Spirit calls lost souls into the saving fellowship of the communion of saints.

So, get up, eat and drink. Listen to the Word of God as his voice whispers to your heart, and continue on your journey secure in the knowledge that the LORD is our strength in days of discouragement. Amen. <SDG>