

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 437, 08-15-2021 † Pentecost 12

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

1 KINGS 19

³Elijah was afraid, and he ran for his life. He went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and he left his servant there. ⁴But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. There he sat down under a broom tree, where he prayed that he would die. He said, "I've had enough, LORD. Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers." ⁵Then he lay down and went to sleep under the broom tree.

Suddenly an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."

⁶Then he looked around, and near his head there was a loaf of bread baking on coals and a jar of water, so he ate and drank, and then he lay down again.

⁷Then the angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, because the journey is too much for you."

⁸So he got up and ate and drank. Then, with the strength gained from that food he walked for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.



This is a sermon about growing weary, and especially about growing weary of the world and how it treats God's Word. Raw. Authentic. Real. Lonely.

We agreed to man a booth at a 4th of July fair. It was for the other WELS church across town, and they just didn't have enough volunteers. So for hours, we were rewarded with the tedious task of running a game that consisted of throwing hoops around little lambs. Then we would pick them up, bring them back, and give them to children to throw these hoops around them again. That day shaped up to be a very humid day. The chance of rain wasn't quite bad or long enough to call it all off, but enough to make us wonder if anyone would show up. But it did rain. And in that moment, in that dripping, leaky booth, the frustrated feeling of wasted time washed over us like a flood. What were we doing out here? It might have been a selfish feeling. It definitely was a feeling of futility and helplessness.

Ministry has its highs and lows, if you're asking. As rewarding a job as it is to serve the Lord, it can also cut deep. Maybe it's knocking on a door that gets slammed in your face. Maybe it's the person who finally confronts you simply to say that you can't do anything right. Maybe it's the days when your temper or your ignorance is showing.

I don't really like the idea of airing my grievances to you, as if you should feel sorry for your pastor and give him special attention. That has never sat right with me. Yet what loneliness and raw emotion wells up within a prophet or a pastor matters to anyone who knows and loves the Word of God. Anyone who holds these pages in trembling hands needs to be aware that this can be life-or-death.

Yet sometimes we make more out of it than we should. When life does not feel like a blessing, we make it into life or death. We make it about fear, we make it about ourselves, and we make it worse. Because of these sins, we risk wandering off from Christ. If only we remembered that, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Php 1:21).

Elijah had a death wish. We pray, "If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." Elijah said, "No, really, let me die before I wake."

This doesn't make very much sense to me. Stalwart, bold Elijah? How could he? Elijah was just coming off a big victory over the prophets of Baal. The false prophets called for fire from heaven to burn up an animal sacrifice. The false prophets failed all day long. When it was Elijah's turn, God dropped fire that licked up the sacrifice, the whole altar, and a trench full of water around it. The people saw who is true God, the false prophets were executed, and for a moment it seemed like the northern kingdom would now turn to the Lord.

Instead, wicked Queen Jezebel threatened Elijah's life, giving him 24 hours to live. So Elijah not only feared for his life, but ran away, far into the desert, and begged for death. It seems a tad melodramatic. Elijah had just proclaimed and witnessed God's power. Some suggest that Jezebel sending someone to kill Elijah shows that she wasn't able or didn't mean to actually put him to death. Her real purpose may have been to keep Elijah from further converting the wicked, but weak, King Ahab.

But Elijah ran for the desert anyway. There he fell asleep. An angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." And there was bread and water, food from the angel.

Twice Elijah was told to get up and eat. His journey was going to be a long one, “too much for” Elijah. He would need the strength God gave through that angel food made up of bread and water. Then the guy got up and ran 40 days and 40 nights, still in the opposite direction. “Elijah’s flight” was a miracle. Presumably he was given endurance through the angel food. What energy! Super food and an energy drink from heaven. He was renewed for a new day of ministry. He ran all the way to Mt. Horeb, the mountain of the Lord, a mountain which also happens to self-identify as Mt. Sinai. Oddly enough, God didn’t tell Elijah to do that, but to Horeb he went.

Yet the lesson here is not just to take a nap. Nor is the lesson just to eat a snack and you’ll feel better. (You could’ve watched a Snickers bar commercial for that.) The lesson is not simply that the Lord finds us sad and makes us happy. I will not predict that you will literally be touched by an angel today. We would be wise not to imagine every detail as if this is how God will serve us.

The lesson here is to depend on the food that God guarantees. In life or death, among friends or in solitude, when the Word is threatened, God uses that. God gives the right food, His Word, to feed us and renew us.

THE LORD RENEWS THE DISCOURAGED SERVANT

God knows what we need—the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, food from heaven, Word and sacrament. We can say this for sure.

We can say that trials grow the believer. It is just in that time of despondency, loneliness, and authentic raw emotion when the Lord knows how to bring renewal. Raw. Authentic. Real. But never alone. When there are trials, see what God does. When there are trials, see how God grows you.

We can also say that the Lord Jesus is very aware of our lives, never leaving us and never forsaking us. The second time Elijah is touched by an angel, it is the Angel of the Lord. This is the only Angel who receives worship and is called divine names in the Bible. The Angel of the Lord appears to be the Savior Jesus long before He is made true man at Christmas. This is the Savior who fed Elijah and who continues to feed His people.

That rainy day manning our neighboring church’s 4th of July booth, I talked to someone. At first I didn’t remember it, but I had a conversation with one

particular dad. That dad brought his son to our drama camp later that month. Then they came to church around Christmas and eventually had their children baptized. They joined that church and they are still members. Later on I asked the dad, “Now remind me; what brought you to our church in the first place?” “Pastor, don’t you remember talking at the 4th of July festival?” Oh, yeah. The day in the rain was worth it. It was worth the long hours and the feelings of frustration, for it meant that Jesus could feed one more family with food from heaven, food that saves, Word and sacrament—for His sake, Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.