

"Fed Up? Be Fed!"

1 Kings 19:1-8

August 12, 2012

12th Sunday After Pentecost

Summer is a great time for a vacation or a retreat. Many of our members are at such a retreat at Camp Trinity in Bigfork this weekend. We go on vacations because we need rest. We work hard throughout the year and we need that rest from labor. If we don't get enough rest, we'll either become physically exhausted or mentally burned out.

That was Elijah's problem in our text for today. He had worked hard for the Lord. Results were not his problem. His work had met with great success. He had stood up to King Ahab of Israel, condemned him for his sinful practices, and said there would be no rain as a result of that. And he was right. During this time of draught, he lived with a widow at Zarephath where a handful of flour and a little oil miraculously provided enough food to last for a long time. When her son died, Elijah was able to bring him back to life. The crowning point of his service to the Lord was when he took on the 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. You remember the story: they and he each had a bull tied to an altar. Both were to pray to their gods and the god who answered was to be declared to be the true God. The prophets of Baal prayed for several hours with no results. Elijah soaked his sacrifice with water three times and then prayed to the Lord. The Lord answered with fire from heaven that not only consumed the sacrifice but also the wood, the stones, the soil, and the water. The people declared that the Lord is God and they killed the false prophets. Surely, Elijah thought, this great victory will turn things around and the Lord will be worshiped again in Israel!

Yet he became tired and discouraged. After all this hard work for the Lord and an apparent change by the people, Elijah receives a message from Queen Jezebel. She had heard about the killing of "her" prophets and so she sends a messenger to Elijah with this message: "So may the gods to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." In other words, "I vow to my gods to kill you by this time tomorrow."

Perhaps now you can understand Elijah's actions. He had been faithful to the Lord. He had done good work for the Lord that had produced some phenomenal results. He thought that now he was really going to make some progress and change these unfaithful people of Israel. And what does he get for his troubles? A death threat! So, in fear for his life, he flees Israel and goes to the Lord to pour out his feelings of despair and hopelessness. He says, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." In other words, "I give up! I have worked and endured enough, and deserve no longer of a life than my fathers. Just let me die!"

In our individual journeys with the Lord, have we not all been in Elijah's shoes (or sandals, as the case may be) and felt the way he did? It is certainly common for pastors. A pastor may make several good calls on prospective members who receive him warmly, show interest in the new members' class, and assure him that they plan to be in church on Sunday and then he not only doesn't see them in church, but the new member class remains empty. He may plan a special service for Easter or Christmas and see the church packed with worshipers. He gets the idea that things are finally going to turn around only to not to see half those people not here the next Sunday. Pastors, when they see the apathy of church members over things spiritual and the lack of response by non-members, desire to go out into the wilderness and tell the Lord, "I've had enough, Lord. I'm no better than anyone else who's held this job. Why bother any more?"

But haven't you also felt this frustration as you serve the Lord? For example, how difficult it is to find people to serve in various ministry opportunities in our congregation. Why is that? Some have other priorities than serving the Lord in this way and that's a different problem. But for others, the problem is that they *have* served the Lord in these ways, have experienced some success in these areas, but they see how it is now and don't want any part of it. For example, we often have hard time recruiting people to teach Sunday School and midweek classes. Why is that? Some of you out there, I'm sure, remember how Sunday School and Midweek *used* to be: full class rooms with eager and respectful students. It was a joy to teach. Now it has become a challenge to teach and there are

oftentimes fewer joys. So, some people say, "I've had enough. I'm no better than anyone else. I've done my time", as if you were discussing a prison sentence rather than serving the Lord. The "old faithful" say "I've done my time. Let the younger ones take over." The younger members say, "I don't want any part of it. I can't do it."

Perhaps the same happens in your life for the Lord outside of the church. You try to witness to your faith to someone - a family member or a close friend – with the hope that they come to faith and become a member of our church. Or, you try to encourage an inactive member to return to the Church. You work long and hard. You pray and you hope. The person seems ready to change. They are interested in church and then, all of a sudden, they just fall away. After enough of these experiences, you are ready to say to the Lord, "I've had enough!"

What's the problem here? After seeing innumerable proofs of God's power and mercy, why was Elijah now afraid of Queen Jezebel and discouraged to the point of wanting to die? After seeing innumerable proofs of God's power and mercy, why are we afraid of those who oppose the Gospel and discouraged to the point of giving up? We might be tempted to blame the people whom we are trying to serve and say it is *their* fault. *They* have sinned by rejecting the Gospel. Elijah probably felt that way, when, after defeating the prophets of Baal, the queen wanted to kill him, rather than thank him. That, of course, is true. When the Gospel is rejected, those who reject it *are* sinning.

But that does not mean that we are without fault here, too. When we stop teaching, confessing, or witnessing to the Gospel, we are sinning, also. We may say that we have been driven to that course of non-action because of the stubbornness and rejection of the people to whom we have tried to witness. But why is that? Our sinful pride tells us that we are responsible, not only for sharing the Gospel, but for bringing about the desired results. When things don't happen the way we want them to happen when we want them to happen in our service to the Lord and His church, we become frustrated and want to give up.

This is sinful because the church is the Lord's, not ours. The work of the church is the work of the Lord, not us. And the results and the timetable for the results are in the Lord's control, not ours. If we try to make the ministry ours or try to take responsibility for the results, we are trying to take the place of God and that violates the First Commandment.

But notice how God deals with Elijah here. If someone was trying to take over your job or trying to tell you what to do, wouldn't you be upset? But the Lord isn't. He doesn't bawl out Elijah for his fear of Jezebel, his lack of faith, or his refusal to do the work the Lord had given him. Nor does the Lord say, "I'll take care of that Queen Jezebel like you wanted and I'll convert all the people of Israel like you think I should." Instead, the Lord sent an angel to feed him with a cake of bread and a jar of water. Why? As the angel said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." The Lord knew that the work He had given Elijah to do was too much for him to handle on his own. But, instead of canceling the work ahead or changing the work to make it easier, the Lord gave Him this miraculous food to nourish Him and strengthen Him for the journey that lay ahead -- continued service for the Lord.

The Lord does the same for you and me. He knows our frustrations as we serve Him in the way that He has called us. He listens to our frustrations as we pour them out to Him in prayer without condemning us for our lack of faith or for the times when we have given up and refused to do what He has wants us to do. He doesn't always make the work easier or solve all the problems that we have in the way that we think best. He may not convert our friend immediately or make those kids in Sunday School behave and pay attention.

However, the Lord does for us what He did for Elijah. He says, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." Instead of allowing us to wallow around in our own self-pity and discouragement, the Lord of heaven and earth invites you and me to share a meal which will sustain us in our journey of life with Him. Only it is not mere bread and water. It is what Jesus speaks of in the Gospel reading where He said, "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.” The meal is Jesus.

The banquet table is often spread here at Peace as God feeds us with the body and blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, to nourish us and strengthen us for the journey that lies ahead. This bread from heaven nourishes our souls by bringing us the forgiveness Jesus won on the cross through the sacrifice of His life. Where sin had separated us from Him and one another, He brings us back into union. We are thus freed from the sinful pride that thinks we are responsible for bringing about results in the Kingdom of God. We are nourished in our faith to trust God and His plan and His timetable for accomplishing things. We are refreshed for continued service without fear of rejection as we leave everything in God's hands.

In our text, when Elijah had been fed, there was no more grumbling or talk about wanting to die. Neither did Elijah stay in that place so he could just eat and not have to face the tasks to which the Lord was calling him. However, having been strengthened and renewed, God sent Elijah forth to continue serving Him and Elijah obeyed.

The same scenario exists here. When God feeds us in the Lord's Supper with the richness of the bread from heaven, the body and blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, there is no more reason to complain or give up. We are strengthened and renewed through the blessings given in Holy Communion. Yet we are not to simply remain here and bask in the glory of these blessings. God sends us forth from here, strengthened and renewed, to continue serving Him in whatever area He has called us to serve and, perhaps, in new areas.

The journey ahead is long and hard. We cannot look backwards to what we think "the good old days were like". Nor can we look ahead and expect to face the journey on our own. We shall surely fail or kill ourselves trying. Instead, let us eat and drink the food provided for you by the Lord often. Be strengthened and renewed with His love and forgiveness. Then leave this place and face

the journey ahead, serving Him in the way He has called you to, leaving everything in His hands. You will never be disappointed again. Amen.