

The Spiritual Power of a Snack and a Nap

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year B: Pentecost 11: I Kings 19:4-8

⁴But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." ⁶He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." ⁸He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

Just like when we were children, our bodies need the strength of food and rest for our earthly journey. We need the spiritual food that Jesus provides for our spiritual journey. God is the one who provides. Elijah and Jesus show us how.

Our bodies knew it when we were little people. When you and I were one and two years old, our bodies knew when they needed a break. I've been fascinated watching 18 month old, Junia Steitz. When it gets close to nap time, her eyelids get droopy, and she gets a little cranky when playing. Then after nap-time, a snack of applesauce will wake her up and she is ready to go, go, go!

Perhaps a few of you more senior members can relate to that as well? I'm not certain...but maybe!

The title of today's sermon, I borrowed from someone else. But it is "Never Underestimate the Spiritual Power of a Snack and a Nap."

In the 1 Kings lesson, the prophet Elijah is utterly exhausted from doing the Lord's work. He is fleeing for his life from the evil Queen Jezebel. He has spoken truth to power with only small results. He has done all he could, there is nothing left in his spirit to give to anyone. Dejected, tired, and frustrated, he journeys into the wilderness and there pleads with God that he might die.

But it is there that God provides a snack and a nap. After lying down and sleeping under the broom tree, the angel of the Lord tells Elijah that he needs the food for the journey ahead. "Get up and eat."

Now if you've ever suffered from depression, or complete exhaustion, like our Elijah is suffering, you know how difficult it can be to 1. Get up and 2. Eat. Just getting up from a chair or the bed can be ridiculously hard when you're depressed. Even the thought of what to make to eat, can tire you out, let alone actually getting food from the frig or cereal from the pantry.

Elijah – this guy is tired. He sees no way out, so he'd rather die than move forward. That's his mental state.

Instead of abandoning him to his fate, the Lord provides and feeds him. Not once, but twice. The Lord feeds Elijah's body and allows him to sleep a deep restful sleep...in the wilderness.

In scripture, we know that divine occurrences take place in the wilderness. God loves to move in places where there are no road maps or stoplights. Remember the people of Israel wandering for forty years? Remember Jesus in the desert for forty days? The wilderness is a no-place space where our old tricks for living don't work. It might feel like a dead-end to us, but to the Lord, the wilderness is an open canvas upon which to work. Because we've come to the end of our rope, that means God can now untangle it and hand us one strand to hang onto.

As our King of Glory Safety team met this week, it was clear we were all tired of navigating this pandemic. Tired of making decisions. Tired of trying to think critically about the love of neighbor Jesus commands without risking our individual and communal health. Truly, we are only on the sidelines! We still must pray for the mental and physical strength of the medical providers. They are in the thick of it all.

And you, you and I know the wilderness places in our lives. We know looking around or looking backwards, what has exhausted us and driven us into places of frustration, or confusion. Parenting. Illness. Employment issues. Moving. Death of life-long friends. Concern for the welfare of creation or refugees. But if this text shows us anything, we are not just intellectuals. We cannot journey on without taking into account what our bodies and spirits need. We all need snacks and naps.

For Elijah, that was rest, bread and water. Simple bread and water. Bread and water, brought him back mentally, physically and spiritually to a space where he could get up and once again serve the Lord. He had important things to do, like

anointing a new king and his own successor Elisha. Elijah needed the bread God provided.

For those of you who are bread bakers, you'll understand this lesson with an example of a sourdough "starter." For those of you who aren't bread bakers...keep listening, you'll get the idea. A "starter" is the uncooked dough for making bread, pancakes, waffles, etc. But even the "starter" must be fed. Yes, 'starters' must have regular "feedings". Those feedings consist of additional water and flour. When that water and flour gets added, the yeast and lactobacilli, feed together and it bubbles and doubles. The dough begins bubbling and it doubles in size. Then it rests again, before the next feeding.

The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." ⁸He got up and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God." The provision of God, the grace of God, and the literal food God provides will give us the strength to journey on.

Jesus said to the people, "I Am the bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry."

This is powerful news indeed! While snacks and naps take care of physical needs, Jesus takes care of spiritual needs. God's people, the ancient Israelites ate the manna – the food – God provided in the wilderness. They ate it every day. But the food Jesus provides us, the living food, like that starter bread, continues to feed us now and into eternity.

Jesus is God's Son sent from heaven to love us into relationship and feed us with His very life.

Today it is not difficult to see wilderness all around. During this ongoing pandemic, divorce rates went up. Child abuse went up. Hunger increased. People confused and exhausted, are at the end of their ropes.

But we know a God who feeds us physically, mentally, and spiritually! Jesus is the Bread of Life. We, you and I, have another framework through which to encounter that wilderness. The God of the past, present and future, comes to us, calls our name, and offers us peace. We know that God! And it's even better than a snack and a nap! God feeds us by speaking directly to us through the Scriptures,

connecting our daily experience to God's divine wisdom. Jesus said, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

But really, what does that mean? So often we talk in metaphors like 'Bread of Life'. We speak in language that doesn't readily translate to how to connect to God. How are we fed by God?

We're going to end the sermon with this spiritual practice right now. I'll read again the passage from 1 Kings. I invite you to close your eyes and listen. Listen for a word or phrase that touches your spirit. Listen for a word that intrigues you, that tugs at your heart, that shimmers in mystery. When we open our spirits, God lifts up a word from scripture that our minds, bodies, and hearts need to hear. Where is God offering you food or rest? What word does God want you to hear this day? That is the spiritual food God provides.

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Now, hold onto that word and ponder it this day. What does it mean to you right now in your own circumstances? Reflect upon it. God is giving it to you as food. Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.

Thanks be to God for snacks and naps!
Amen.