

## 1 Kings 19:1-8

This is a good story for us. It speaks to us in a way that other Bible stories do not. Before this one, in 1 Kings, we hear the story of Elijah on Mt. Carmel. 450 prophets of Baal prayed to their god to devour their sacrifice with fire. They even cut themselves with knives, but no fire came. Then Elijah prayed to the true God and his sacrifice was consumed by fire from heaven. And then Elijah slew all of the 450 prophets of Baal.

That's an amazing story. But we really cannot relate. It's so far away from us and where we are in our lives. The drama the Old Testament prophets dealt with puts them into another category. Not gods, but not really human either. Somewhere in between. And very different from us.

So it's good that today we see Elijah as he really is. A man, like us, who had emotions. And now and then he acted on them. His emotions got the better of him. We see him fearing for his life. He had stood up to King Ahab on Mt. Carmel. But when Queen Jezebel swears to kill him, "*by this time tomorrow,*" he runs away frightened. And then he feels guilty. God had not told him to run, but he did anyway. Elijah feels so awful about acting like a coward that he tells God to take his life.

Now this is the Elijah I can relate to. Not the one who commands fire from heaven. Not the one who kills the prophets of Baal. The one who acts on impulse and then regrets having done so. The Elijah who deals with guilt, depression, pain, and who feels that he is no longer of any use to God.

This is me more often than I care to admit. And it may be you. If it is, then you are in the right place. The church is not the gathering of god-like men and women who are in a category above everyone else. These pews are reserved for those of us who, like Elijah, too often run away from our fears instead of standing in the strength of the Lord. This Communion table is for those of us who deal with regrets, guilt, pain, and know what it's like to feel useless, even to God.

This is the Elijah we see today. And though he is a wretched mess, God is not done with him, nor does He abandon him. He sits down under a broom tree. Not one tree among many. The Hebrew text says that this is one, solitary broom tree out in the desert. God put that tree there for him. Elijah cannot go on. He is physically exhausted, mentally stressed, emotionally a wreck, and spiritually weak.

We've been there, haven't we? We have our own Jezebels that we have dealt with, and who drain us. We have our own set of fears; our own excuses for running, for hiding. And when we run, God leads us to the tree that He has placed into our desert. Not one tree among many. A lone, solitary broom tree.

Broom trees grow to about ten to twelve feet high. And I imagine that, too, is about how high the cross of Jesus was raised. That's our broom tree. There is shade there for you. There is a place to rest. And no matter how much regret you have...how much guilt; no matter how exhausted, stressed, and weak, there is a place for you under Jesus' cross.

It's a broom tree. I read that the branches of a broom tree actually can be used like brooms to sweep out the dust and dirt from houses. And so Jesus' cross is your broom tree. It sweeps away the dust and dirt in your life. His blood, which trickled down that tree, cleanses you of all the wretched filth of your past. It sweeps it all away, and you are declared completely clean.

An angel came to Elijah as he was under the tree. It wasn't enough just to rest. He needed to eat and drink. And so the angel brought a cake and a jar of water. And Elijah ate and drank. God's angel brings such food and drink to you. Angels are messengers. They bring what God gives. Today your pastor is that messenger. He doesn't bake the cake or fill the jar with water. God does. Your angel simply delivers God's food and drink to you.

And so today as you rest here in the shade of the broom tree... Yes, here, for this is where we come to rest beneath the cross. It's here where the cross is proclaimed. "*We preach Christ crucified,*" is what we are all about here. Today under the broom tree God gives you the food and drink you need. Jesus is that food and drink. "*I am the bread of life,*" He says. "*Whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.*"

We see a tiny picture of this in our Bible story. Elijah ate a second time, and in the strength of that food he journeyed forty days and forty nights. How is that possible? It was the food that God gave him to eat and drink. The food carried him along for that long time.

I know of Christians, some of whom are very dear to me, who have been on such a long journey. They have nothing, basically nothing except for the Holy Scriptures. But eating and drinking that food, they are enduring in their journey. And so will you. "*The journey is too great for you.*" The angel spoke these words to Elijah, and they are just as much for you and me. We cannot go on unless we eat and drink the food God gives to us.

What God teaches through this Bible story is something that far too many do not grasp. Elijah was strengthened for the journey by physically eating real food. Far too many Christians have the opinion that their faith will carry them through to the end of their journey. But it's not our faith that carries us; it's Jesus. Faith must be fed and nourished with real, physical food and drink.

This is why Jesus gives us the Sacrament. He places the food and drink we need for our journey in and under real, physical bread and wine. It's why He bids us to hear and study the Holy Scriptures. Through our physical hearing, reading, and pondering, Jesus feeds us for our journey.

We have too many here, just as every congregation does, who think that faith is all they need. But faith does not feed upon itself. God feeds our faith through external, visible food. He leads us in our journey with the same words He gave to Elijah, "*Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.*"

You are blessed if you understand this and act upon it all your life. I want you...more than that, God wants you to endure in your journey. But the journey is too great for you. Yet it is not too great for Jesus. And so He is here for you to eat and drink every time we gather under the broom tree.

Be assured of your place here. Come here each week like Elijah - weary, stressed, fearful, guilty. There is room here for you. There is forgiveness for you; for all of you. Jesus says so. "*I will never cast you out,*" is His promise. Your sins cannot disqualify you. You are forgiven.

Feeding upon Jesus you will go, like Elijah, in the strength of that food; not in the strength of your faith. And you will reach, as Elijah did, the glorious mountain of God. And so come, "*Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.*" Amen.