

1 Kings 19:1-8

When someone wins the gold medal, they are excited, jubilant, relieved. Not Elijah. He won the gold on top of Mt. Carmel. Remember? He faced off against the prophets of Baal...450 of them. They prayed and danced all day. They even cut themselves with knives. Yet no fire came to their sacrifice. But Elijah set the world record. He even doused his sacrifice with water--as crazy as running the 100-meter dash backwards--and still fire from heaven consumed all of it. He won. Truly a gold medal performance! Did Elijah celebrate? Hardly. He ran away in fear. Queen Jezebel told him that as he slew her prophets of Baal, so by that time the next day she would slay him! Where's the reward? Where is the satisfaction? Whatever happened to the line, "*To the victor goes the spoils?*" And surely this question entered Elijah's mind, "Where is God?"

Elijah felt all alone. No one cared that his sacrifice beat out the one offered to Baal. No one cared that Elijah showed that the Lord alone is God. No one cared...not even God. That's how it seemed to Elijah. So after traveling a day's journey into the wilderness he sat down under a broom tree, and God's prophet told God what He should do: *Take my life*, he said; "*It is enough, O Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.*"

Now it is gratifying to see Elijah taking the opposite attitude of Olympic champions like Usain Bolt. He wins gold and says proudly, "I'm the best sprinter of all time!" But here's Elijah crying in humility: *I'm no better than my fathers who perished out here in the desert. I'm not the best; I deserve only death.*"

Let me ask you, have you ever been there...where Elijah was at? You gave your all for the Lord, and you feel like it was a waste of effort? You worked conscientiously for the church, and no one really seemed to care, not even God? At times you feel all alone. You cast your vote, but government follows the path of least resistance anyway. It does what is popular, not what is right. You love, you care, you pray. But those you love do not respond with love. Those under your care make bad choices and everyone is hurt. Those you pray for never seem to get better. Like Elijah, you've traveled about as far as you can go. It's been a long day, a long week, a long and tiring life.

And so, just as Elijah did, you have come here and sat down under the shade of this tree. And maybe you are here just because it's a nice weekend for a change. Or maybe you are here because you're supposed to be here. Or maybe because you felt drawn to come somehow. But friend, it is important for you to know that the words spoken here are the same for everyone. And the same words that God gave to Elijah are the words God gives to each one of you: "*Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.*"

Elijah surely felt that all his effort was in vain, and that even God had forsaken him. But God was not through with him. He had work yet for Elijah to do. Through him, God would still speak. Through him, God would still act. And to Elijah God would still show mercy. And so He appeared to him with food and water and God said, "*Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.*"

Friend, I hope you feel like Elijah this morning. I hope that you have come here today to the shade of this broom tree, and you are weighed down with burden after burden. I hope that, like Elijah, you are exhausted from living, and that you, too, can hardly take another step. Otherwise you will not be hungry, you will not be thirsty; and so when God says to you, "*Arise and eat...*" you will take a pass and respond, "No thanks, maybe next time."

As God appeared to Elijah and set food before him, so He is here today. He is here because the journey is too great for you. You will not make it without Him. Without His food and drink, without God's Word--the true and living Bread--without Jesus, who is food and drink for your soul, and who is set here before you in Word and in Sacrament, you will not survive the journey. You won't make it. God says you won't. The journey through life as a Christian living by faith, the journey to heaven, the journey in which Jezebel--Satan--is after you to kill your faith, the journey in which it seems that God so often has abandoned and forsaken you.

But He hasn't. He is here with you as He was with Elijah. And His food and drink is as much for you as it was for Elijah. God knows the journey is too great for you, and so He is the one who has drawn you here today because He is here with good news for you. He knows, He has, He is exactly what it takes for you to make the journey. His food and drink for you here is the forgiveness of your sins, relief from the pangs of your guilty conscience, strength to live by faith. Elijah was wrong, and so are you, if you think that God does not care, that He has more important things to do than caring for you. Why do you think He sent His Son to the cross? He sent Him there for you! Jesus found no place to rest. He did not find the shade of a tree under which He could sit down. Instead, they nailed Him to one. No shade for Him. Only the hot, burning wrath of His Father in heaven searing into His very soul because He was dying for you on that cross. He was paying the price for your lack of love, for your bad choices in life, for your utter refusal to obey God.

But because He did that for you, here under the shade of Jesus' tree is food and drink for your journey. Your sins, no matter how many, how great and terrible they are, your sins are forgiven. This is the food that God invites you to eat today. Arise in faith and believe that your God is merciful to you; believe that He is not against you, but is for you.

Elijah did rise, he did eat, and he did make the journey. And so will you, not by staying away from this place, but by coming here to the shade of Jesus' tree where He Himself is the food and drink for your journey; where He in mercy, every time you come here, says to you, "*Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.*" Amen.