

A Sermon for the  
10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
August 9, 2009  
Texts: 1 Kings 19:4-8  
John 6:35, 41-51

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“But [Elijah] 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.’ Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, ‘Get up and eat.’ He 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. The 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.’ He 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.” 1 Kings 19:4-8

“Jesus said, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They were saying, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.’” John 6:35, 41-51

“Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you,” the angel said to Elijah as he roused him from sleep. Elijah was on the run. He was a wanted man. He had aroused the anger of King Ahab and especially his wife Jezebel with his ferocious encounter with the priests of Baal. He had defeated them when he was able to call down fire from God. After which he had killed 450 of them. 450 priests of Jezebel’s god, Baal. To put it in modern terms, she had taken a contract out on him, and now he was fleeing for his life. In desperation he headed for the wilderness, where exhausted and in despair he had collapsed and fallen asleep under the only tree he could find. He was at his wit’s end and had come to the conclusion that he would be better off dead. In that desperate state of mind he had drifted into sleep. Only to be awakened by God’s

angel bringing bread for him to eat, and water to drink. “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” Again, as with the wandering Israelites in the wilderness, God has provided life sustaining bread. Without the bread of God the journey will be too much.

Now fast forward 800 years or so to our gospel lesson. Jesus had been followed into the wilderness by a crowd desperate for the healing of his words and touch. Jesus received them with compassion and fed their hunger in a miraculous display of God’s abundance, taking five loaves and feeding over 5000 people. The next day they continued to follow him, pursuing him to the other side of the sea. Then Jesus began to interpret for them what had happened when he had fed them. He said to them, “You continue to follow me because you had your fill of bread and want more.” But do not clamor after the bread that perishes, rather seek the bread that endures to eternal life. When you eat of this bread you will never be hungry again. This bread comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. They respond, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Then Jesus shocks the pants off them when he says, “I am this bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, but then they died. This bread comes down from heaven and when you eat it you never die. I am this living bread from heaven. Eat of this bread and you will live forever. This bread I give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Jesus is saying that when you consume him, when you take him in and make him integral to your life, then eternal life - the life of God - becomes part of your life. In fact, it transforms your life because your life is no longer overshadowed by your mortality, the threat of death. You will be with God always, throughout this life and beyond. Death becoming only a passage from one form of life to another. As you go through life, consume the Bread of Life, and he, God’s love, will sustain you. I think the angel’s admonition to Elijah would be appropriate here, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.”

A well known phrase comes to mind, “You are what you eat.” First of all, I was curious about where it had originated. On the website, The Phrase Finder, they reference a couple of 19th century scientist/ philosophers. A frenchman, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, in a physiology-gastronomy text, uses a phrase that translates to something like “tell me what you eat and I will tell you what your are.” Later, the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, in a philosophy text used the phrase “man is what he eats.” But perhaps it began to really emerge as a popular phrase in 1942, when a nutritionist named Victor Lindlahr published a book on diet titled “Your Are What You Eat.” It’s literal meaning speaks of your physical well-being and the instrumental way that what you eat impacts your body and health. But when heard more metaphorically it addresses the whole spectrum of your life, body, mind, and spirit. What you feed your body, your mind, your heart, your soul. What you feed your body is a fundamental concern, but once that has been addressed it is far outweighed in the whole experience of life by the feeding of mind, heart, and soul. These are the things that you consume that define, fulfill, and build you up as a person, not just a body.

Have you ever had a “passion” in your life? A passion is something that so elicits your interest, your enthusiasm, your commitment, that you go all out to explore it, learn it, participate in it. Sometimes we describe a person as “eating and sleeping” whatever that is their passion. A passion can be a minor part of your life, something that is a sideline that provides excitement, escape, a way to widen your interests or understanding of the world. I think of passions for

cooking, or gardening, or a sport. I remember a year when I was a teenager given over to the author J.R.R. Tolkien, reading Lord of the Rings two or three times and being consumed by all things regarding those stories. To say the least, I was excited when forty years later they decided to make movies out of those stories.

One of most fortunate experiences in life is to be able to make your passion your life's work. Being so enthused, inspired, for your work so transforms it that it no longer seems like work. Passions have the characteristic of touching and increasing the spirit, but ultimately they all are what Jesus describes as "the food that perishes." It can sustain you only so far. There is, on the other hand, food to be had that endures for eternal life. This food is a passion that feeds and sustains through all that life's journey encounters, especially the wilderness times of suffering and despair, even through death and beyond. This passion is for the Bread of Life, the life, and wisdom, and compassion, and love of Jesus Christ. God the Father is constantly drawing us towards this passion but we can resist being drawn. I think one way to describe the purpose of the church is to nurture and encourage one another into a passion for this living bread from heaven. When we are eating of it God's life becomes our life, God's love becomes our love, Jesus' compassion becomes our work. It is the only way to feed that hunger in our hearts and souls that remains unsatisfied by anything else we may become excited for. It is the only way to know God's loving presence, the certainty of things hoped for, through whatever life may set before us. We must "get up and eat," or the journey might become too much for us. Amen