

“Enough Is Enough”

This morning’s text tells of an interlude in the life of the great prophet Elijah. You may know of other significant events in Elijah’s life: his miraculous feeding by ravens during a drought; another miraculous feeding by a widow whose grain and jar of oil never emptied as long as there was need; the raising of the widow’s son from the dead, in response to Elijah’s prayer. And then there was the water-soaked altar, engulfed in flames through the power of God summoned by Elijah, demonstrating God’s strength and victory over the false God Baal. In this morning’s text, on the heels of this triumph, Elijah is on the run. Despite his persistence, endurance, and his small victories, Israel remains unfaithful, and Elijah’s life is threatened by enemies. His story continues in 1 Kings 19:3-8:

Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But 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.” 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.

There is a difference between a trip and a journey. Your family may have taken a trip this summer to the beach, to Grandma's, or to visit children. We take trips to the grocery store to pick up milk. We go on business trips. There is a distance traveled, but a trip is more like a jaunt or an excursion.

A journey, on the other hand, is a voyage – a long passage from one place to another, over which something significant happens. We think of a wilderness journey, or a journey of enlightenment. There is a distance traveled, but that distance may not be measured in miles. I've been on a few of those, and I wonder if you have too. The great Elijah in our story is on a journey. In fact, he is on two journeys, each with very different destinations.

Let's look back to where our text, and Elijah's first journey, began.

Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life.

You would think, after all Elijah had experienced of God's power: the miraculous feedings and shows of strength, that he would be immune to fear, but when he gets up, it is to flee. He has worked tirelessly on behalf of God to save the Israelites from descending into false faith and idol worship, only to face isolation, drought, hunger, and threats on his life.

He takes a final journey alone into the wilderness. He stops under the shade of a solitary tree, and says to God, *"It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life."* He falls asleep, presumably hoping to never wake again.

“It’s enough,” he said. In this case, Elijah is really saying, “It’s too much.” “I’ve reached my limit.” “I’m tired of doing it all myself.” He’s feeling lost, discouraged, and exhausted. The mighty Elijah has come to the end of his rope.

It happens to the very best of us.

It’s the life we chose, but we didn’t know it was going to be so hard. There is too much to do. Too much to know. Too much to face, Too much to carry. And we get tired.

Mark and I have always lived away from family, so we felt quite alone in raising our 4 kids. The daily decisions about matters that I knew would affect the rest of their lives would, at times, overwhelm me. As a new mom, I remember asking God, “Why do you think that I can do this?” That was the first of many times in my life when I would ask that question.

But what my mom faced at that age was so much more. She began motherhood in a culture she had never known. My older brother was a newborn when my mom and dad immigrated to the United States. When she came to this country, my mom knew nothing of the language or its customs. She didn’t understand the currency or the system of weights and measures. The food was completely foreign to her: buying it, cooking it, or eating it. She had never used any of the appliances she found here. She didn’t drive, and could only guess at what people were saying to her in response to her constant looks of bewilderment. She didn’t just journey to the wilderness; she lived in it. And she didn’t want to stay.

In the wilderness, there are no signposts. You get disoriented, and you can begin to think irrationally. Fears are magnified, and it becomes easy to lose hope. This is where we find Elijah, sleeping to escape his lot. To him, his glory and his journey are behind him and finished. But this is not where his story ends.

Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat".

Two things strike me here. First, the angel came to him. Elijah's prayer had been for death. But the response was life: sustenance, nourishment, provision. God met him in the wilderness.

Second, notice the way the angel woke Elijah. It would have been logical for the angel to come with reprimands: "You're giving up? Have you not seen what God has done, Elijah? Wake up!"

I remember when my dad would wake me up in the morning. He would place his big hand on my back, and I would wake up slowly knowing he was near. It was a good way to start the day.

What Elijah needs to bring him back is understanding, patience, gentleness, and the bread of life. The angel wakes him with a touch and an offer of food. Elijah complies, eats the food, and then promptly falls back asleep. He's not ready to get up and begin again. But the angel is persistent. He touches Elijah a second time and this time elaborates.

"Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you."

This is where Elijah is surprised. His journey is not behind him. It's ahead of him. And it will be too much for him... but not for God. God will provide all that Elijah will need. It took Elijah one day to reach the wilderness, but on the strength of this food, Elijah journeys a second time for forty days and forty nights.

Whereas in the first journey, Elijah traveled in fear, this time he travels in hope.

He came to the wilderness depleted and leaves with renewed energy.

His first destination was death, and his second destination? To Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai, the same place where Moses first met God and received his call.

When Elijah traveled the first time, he had 'had enough.' Now after his encounter with the angel, he 'has enough.' Enough to do what God needs him to do. Elijah won't die in the desert. After many more episodes in his life, Elijah will be taken to Heaven on a chariot of fire.

My mother also had an angel in her life. She was Aunt Martha. Not my real aunt, but she was dearer to my mom than any sister could ever have been. I didn't quite understand as a teenager why my mom clung to her so tightly with tears streaming down her face when they were reunited again after a 10-year absence. But now I know, Aunt Martha had saved her. Back in those lonely days, she took my mom to the stores, and showed her what to do. She taught my mom how to cook, helped her with her language. She brought her to her own place of work, and helped her get a job as an international telephone operator, where her Spanish was an asset. With Aunt

Martha, my mom ventured out of her wilderness and into a world of possibilities and purpose. She became a citizen, and raised 4 American kids.

What burdens do you carry? Health issues? Worries about parents? Worries about kids? Maintaining the schedule? School concerns, financial struggles, career matters weighing on you, troubled relationships? Addictions of all kinds?

Is this the world that God created for us? No. Our life is meant to be abundant and purposeful, and God never intended that we go it alone. There are angels all around us. When someone else is there, it's no longer the wilderness. Maybe your angel is on its way.

Maybe it's that quiet voice with a persistent reminder to look at a situation more closely.

Maybe it was the friends who came and stole you away for a time so you could come back and see with new eyes. Maybe it was the solution that appeared from an unexpected source. Maybe it was that friendly face, or that listening ear.

Who came to you at that perfect time with the perfect word to wake you out of your stupor? Who was that voice for you, crying out in the wilderness announcing Jesus, bearing ice cream and telling you that everything was going to be okay? Tell them, "You were my angel, and I'll be yours." That's the world God created.

Like Elijah, we all have times in the wilderness, when we have relied on our own food, and it hasn't been enough. Stop before you get there. Look for the food next to you, and feel that gentle touch. It's there. Take the second journey with God, the path of strength, hope, and abundance. There is more to do, and you will be able. Get up and eat. Your chariot is waiting.

Amen