



First United Church of Oak Park

A Nap and a Snack

1 Kings 19:1-8

Lydia Mulkey

June 19, 2022

Elijah was a prophet. Prophets were those who held the powerful accountable. When powerful people like King Ahab and his wife Jezebel changed the priorities of the nation, Elijah pointed out the inevitable consequences of their actions. Ahab and Jezebel were a constant bother to Elijah. You see, Jezebel was a Canaanite and Baal was considered the most powerful God in the heavens by the Canaanites. Baal was the God of rain and of fertility. According to Canaanite religious practice, if you pleased and honored Baal, you would have plentiful rain and a good harvest. The problem was, there was a drought in Israel. Since King Ahab married a Canaanite, she was, of course, concerned that they please Baal in order to end the drought. So, to please Baal, she had been killing off all the prophets of the Hebrew people's God that she could get her hands on and giving power to the Canaanite priests of Baal. Her hope was that Baal would be pleased and save Israel from the drought. Knowing this, Elijah, one of the prophets Jezebel wanted assassinated, went to Ahab and asked him to assemble the priests of Baal so they could settle this thing. He essentially challenges them to a you-know-what contest to see whose God is more powerful. They each put an offering on the table and ask their God to pour down fire. The priests of Baal went first. They try all day and nothing happens. Elijah taunts them in the most immature way possible, saying "oh no... I bet your God isn't hearing you because he's meditating... or maybe he just went to run and errand or something. Do you think he fell asleep? You should yell and wake him up." Then, Elijah has people pour water all over his altar 3 times to make sure it's completely drenched, calls on the God of Abraham, and the thing goes up in flames. After that, having won the you-know-what contest, Elijah kills the priests of Baal and the sky lets loose with a torrential downpour, ending the drought. That's where we pick up today.

1 Kings 19:1-8

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may

the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” 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, or 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.”

This part of Elijah’s story reminds me of the quote by Anne Lamott, “Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.” Elijah needed a minute.

Before we get into that, though, let’s address the elephant in the room. This story is violent. It makes God sound petty. The Bible is a collection of stories describing human beings’ unfolding understanding of God and of their own lives. How did these folks make sense of a terrible drought and a war? It’s God proving to be the one and only God and violence to prove that is justified. I don’t happen to agree with the ancient Hebrew people about this particular point. I don’t think God is out to prove anything except her love for us. It’s interesting to read about that understanding, but it’s also important to reject it. What does resonate with me as an eternal truth from this story is what happens to us when we are at our lowest.

Elijah was at his lowest. Being a prophet meant holding powerful people accountable and reminding them of the consequences of their actions. Some of you have done the work of a prophet. You have tried to hold the powerful accountable. You have tried to point them to the consequences of their actions. That is exhausting work. People are always mad at you and the work never ends. Elijah is being hunted down. He is so tired mentally, spiritually, and physically, that he just wants to lie down under a broom tree and die right then and there. He felt he could not go on.

I want you to think about the most exhausted you've ever been. Think of a time when you were mentally, spiritually, and physically spent. What did that feel like in your body? What emotions were you experiencing? Or did you just feel numb? What did you want most in that moment? Did God feel close or distant? Now, I want you to lie down next to Elijah under the broom tree in your mind and hear what God wants to do for you. You can close your eyes if that helps. Are you there under the broom tree? As you lie there, this is what happens...

Suddenly an angel touches you and says, "Get up and eat." There at your head is your favorite baked good, fresh out of the oven and a refreshing glass of water. You eat and then fall into a restful sleep. When you have slept just enough, the angel comes a second time, touches you, and says, "Have some more to eat. You need your strength for this journey."

What a beautiful response when we are at our lowest. The angel didn't say, "You need to try harder!" or, "You're right about not being good enough," or, "Why can't you just pull it together?" No, the angel, the voice of God, says, "Why don't you have a snack and take a little nap?" I may not agree with the ancient Hebrews about God being violent, or God participating in contests of strength, but I agree that God will always come to us when we are at our lowest and try to prove to us that we are loved and cared for.

Sometimes the journey is too much. Sometimes the work of a prophet, to hold the powerful accountable and show them the consequences of their actions, feels too hard and you just want to quit. It's understandable. The next time you find yourself in that place, remember the angel of God. Remember the angel of God who touches you and gives you a freshly baked snack and some water and lets you take a little nap. Beloved, God knows what you need, and it is God's great joy to give it to you. Thank you, God, for that! Amen.