

**Pentecost 12 / August 11, 2024**

**1 Kings 19:7-8**

**“And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, ‘Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.’ And he arose and ate and drank and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.”**

### **Arise and Eat for the journey is great**

It is said, ‘you are what you eat.’ Food is a necessity and the type of foods we eat greatly affects our health and wellbeing. People engaged in high energy activities, such as athletes, must eat foods that will provide the energy they need to perform at the necessary level to accomplish their tasks and achieve their goals. There is a cereal brand, “Wheaties,” that once advertised itself as “The Breakfast of Champions,” featuring world class athletes on its box cover. Lack of food and an inadequate diet can affect a person’s mental as well as physical health. Children who lack adequate nutrition may experience developmental difficulties and have trouble learning. Some schools in an effort to foster learning and mitigate behavioural issues related to poor nutrition, have breakfast and lunch programs, so all students have something to eat each day and no one goes hungry. We need food for daily living. The better quality the food we eat, the better we will live each day.

Fasting is the action of abstaining from food for a period of time. We all fast at night and so the first meal in the morning is ‘breakfast,’ breaking the fast. Many medical procedures, tests and surgery, require patients to abstain from food for twelve, twenty-four or more hours in advance. Some people practice fasting as part of their devotional routine. Moses fasted forty days and nights in the presence of God on Mount Sinai. Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness at the beginning of His public ministry. Some people have the practice of fasting before receiving holy communion. The purpose of such fasting is to remind us that God is the source of the food we eat and the most important nutrition He supplies is Christ Jesus. He nourishes our bodies through the bread of creation. He nourishes our spirits with the living bread from heaven, Christ Jesus. He is the true bread of life. Whoever eats of Him in faith and drinks deeply of the forgiveness of His cross, receives strength to endure the hardships, trials and difficulties of this life. All who eat the food He gives in faith, will stand with Him in the presence of His heavenly Father in the resurrection to eternal life.

Elijah is one of the most famous Old Testament prophets. He lived almost three thousand years ago and people still name children after him. There are basketball, baseball and football players named Elijah. There might even have been an Elijah whose name and image graced a ‘Wheaties’ breakfast of champions box cover. Elijah was a champion, though his diet consisted of locusts and wild honey rather than breakfast cereal. In the chapter previous to our text, He summoned the people of Israel and the prophets of the rival religion of Baalism, to meet at the top of Mount Carmel. It was time for Israel to see which deity was truly God and to decide whether they would serve Baal or the Lord. He asked “How long you will go limping between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God follow him.” They would have a contest to show who was God and which to follow. The god who answered prayer and sent fire from heaven to ignite a sacrifice on an altar would be proven God and the people would follow Him.

The prophets of Baal prayed, shouted, danced, sang and cut themselves. There was no reply. No one was there. Elijah prayed. The Lord answered immediately with fire from heaven to show Himself God. Elijah won the contest hands down. But almost immediately victory was turned into defeat. Rather than repenting of her idolatry and turning to worship the Lord, Queen Jezebel the instigator of the intrusion of the false god into Israel, vowed to kill Elijah. Defeat had been snatched from the jaws of victory. Elijah fled into the southern kingdom of Judah and from there into the wilderness, seeking refuge from the wrath of the queen. Despondent at the apparent failure of his prophetic ministry, he lay beneath the shade of a broom tree and prayed to die, saying, “I am no better than my fathers.” In his opinion and to all appearances, he had failed in His ministry as a prophet. There is nothing more draining than defeat.

In an athletic contest the winning team's energy level grows with each success. The losing team loses energy as they sense defeat. Nothing is more tiring than being overpowered. The team being dominated gasps for air, their hands hang limp at their sides. They can't wait to get off the field for rest and a refreshing drink. Elijah was completely exhausted mentally, physically and most importantly, spiritually. The Angel of the Lord, often interpreted as the preincarnate Christ since He receives divine worship, awakens him with a touch, feeds him with cake and refreshes him with water. The angel says, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." Elijah, strengthened by that food and refreshed by that drink, was empowered to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai, where he stood in the presence of the Lord.

Elijah journeyed from Israel to distant Arabia, where Mount Horeb sets. It was an incredible journey in that sense alone. But more than a journey from one geographical location to another, Elijah's greatest journey was of the spirit in His relationship with God. He felt he had failed in His service of God, despite the powerful sign the Lord had given, sending fire from heaven. His efforts had failed to change the heart of the queen. It's a long journey into the presence of the Lord. The Apostle Paul likened the Christian life to a Marathon in which the journey is great. Every believer has ups and downs in her or his faith journey. Each of us has times of weariness and experience feelings of depression and defeat, both because of our outward circumstances and because of our inner struggle with sin. We cannot reach our destination without the help of the Spirit and the nourishment of our Saviour Jesus. He is the living bread. He gives living water to strengthens us on the way, so He may bring us into the presence of the Lord, not on Mount Horeb, but in His resurrection to life everlasting.

If a prophet as famous as Elijah experienced despair and expressed feelings of failure and defeat, no believer is immune from such feelings. The Lord did not condemn or criticize Elijah. He sent His angel to nourish him with food and refresh him with water. Food and water empowered by God Himself, because the text says he went in the power of that food forty days and forty nights into the presence of God at Mount Horeb. Talk about a breakfast of champions! The Lord nourishes believers with heavenly food and drink through the words of scripture; read, heard and embodied in the water of baptism and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. These are not simply outward signs by which believers identify themselves as Christians. They are the vehicles of the Holy Spirit. Through them God washes away our sins, refreshes our spirits and nourishes our faith, so we may continue in the way and ultimately come to our destination in His presence in the resurrection to everlasting life. Directing us to these means of grace, He says to us as He said to Elijah, "Rise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." The journey is too great for us on our own. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. In the power and strength of our Saviour Jesus we are brought through every trial, comforted in every sorrow and empowered to faith in every circumstance of life. Jesus is the bread by which we our strengthened on the way. He is the living water through whom we reach our journey's happy end in eternal life.

Elijah wasn't the failure he thought himself to be. When he came to Horeb, the Lord told him that through his ministry, He had preserved the faith of seven thousand in Israel. Elijah was spared the death common to most prophets, like a champion he was translated to heaven in a chariot of fire. He was chosen to represent the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament as He stood with Moses beside Jesus on the Mountain of Transfiguration. The Lord doesn't view our lives as negatively as we may do. He sees in grace and treats us with kindness. Elijah stood in Jesus, the true champion. Testimony to Jesus is the spirit of prophecy! Elijah fought against powerful enemies, the followers of the false god Baal, the king and queen of Israel. Jesus fought against sin, death and devil. He triumphed through the blood of His cross. In what appeared to be defeat He won the victory for Elijah, for you, for me and for every human soul.

The journey is too great for us, but not for Jesus. We journey in the strength of His divinity and the power of His love. We journey, feasting daily on the words of scripture through which the Holy Spirit kindles faith in our hearts, sets it aglow and fans it into flame. We journey, returning to the refreshing water of our baptism, through which the Lord washes away our sins and covers us with His righteousness. We journey, feasting regularly and often on the nourishment of Christ's holy body and precious blood in holy communion. Through this blessed sacrament Jesus touches us with His righteousness in forgiveness, blesses us with the Holy Spirit for daily living and gives us a foretaste of the feast to come in eternal life. He says, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great." In Him we receive the nourishment of eternal life. In His power and in His nourishment, we journey to the fulfillment of faith in the presence of God. The journey is great. He is greater still. In Jesus' Name. Amen.