

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – August 12, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

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1 Kings 19:3-8

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 4) while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." 5) **Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."** 6) He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. 7) The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." 8) So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

The Lord is Our Strength

Dear people of God:

Disappointments, discouragement, depression – these feelings and emotions aren't strangers to any of us, are they? The apparent cause of these feelings may range from feeling pressure on the job or at school to being without a job, or it may be the result of frustrations because the actions of others hurt or hinder us.

In our text, Elijah finds himself feeling discouraged and depressed – in many ways this may be the low-point of his career as a prophet. He was afraid, defeated, burned out and ready to throw in the towel. In a moment, we'll talk a bit more about the outer circumstances of Elijah's life but for right now it's important for us to understand what we might call the root cause or the underlying cause or the real reason for the depression that had overtaken Elijah. Simply put Elijah was over emphasizing self and underestimating God.

How often don't we fall into that same trap? We become discouraged because things didn't work out the way we wanted them to or because we feel like failures – but our real failure was not trusting in the Lord and being willing to accept his will. We are guilty of over emphasizing ourselves and underestimating God's grace and power. In our text for today we are reminded to

Theme: Let the Lord be Our Strength in Days of Discouragement

1. Discouragement can affect us all
2. You can count on the Lord's sustaining presence
3. The Lord will strengthen you to do his will

Elijah's experiences, good and bad are similar to experiences we can relate to. Discouragement can affect us all. And at times the discouragement comes when it makes the least sense. Personally, I've always found the account of Elijah's discouragement to be helpful in times when I've felt a bit depressed. One of the things that strikes me over and over again when I think of this text is how illogical it was for Elijah to be so discouraged at this point in his life. Let's take a moment to put things in perspective.

Elijah was called by the Lord to serve as his prophet during the reign of wicked King Ahab and his Queen Jezebel. The Scriptures tell us that Ahab **did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.** (1 Kings 16:33)

Speaking as the Lord's representative Elijah told this wicked ruler: **"As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."** (1 Kings 17:1) During this time of draught the Lord graciously watched over Elijah – he ordered the ravens to feed Elijah while he hid in the Kerith Ravine and drank from the brook Kerith at the Lord's direction.

When the brook dried up (1 Kings 17:8-9 NIV) **the word of the LORD came to him: 9) "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."** And that's what Elijah did. Once more, the Lord provided for him as well as for the widow and her son – this time by making sure that the widow's supply of flour and oil never ran out. Then tragedy struck the home of the widow. Her son became sick and died – Elijah calmly prayed to the Lord and the Lord restored the boy to life. For three years the Lord cared for Elijah in this miraculous fashion and not once do we hear of Elijah becoming disappointed, discouraged or depressed.

After three years, the Lord told Elijah to go back to Ahab to tell him that rain would return to the land. Once again Elijah went – only to discover that the king and queen were putting the Lord's prophets to death. Not to worry – with the Lord's help Elijah remained strong in the face of adversity and challenged the prophets of Baal to a "contest" which would prove once and for all that the Lord, the God of Israel was real and able to come to the aid of his people.

The location of the contest was Mount Carmel – the god who would send fire to consume a sacrifice which had been prepared for him would be recognized as the Lord, the real God of Israel. As Elijah prepared his sacrifice to the Lord he had it drenched with several barrels of water. (1 Kings 18:38-39 NIV) **Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. 39) When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!"**

The prophets of Baal were killed and the Lord sent rain on the land. That's what had been going on in Elijah's life. It would seem as if he would be on top of the world, "so what's the reason for his depression" we might wonder. There doesn't seem to be any logical reason does there? That's one of the lessons that I've learned from this section of God's Word. Before succumbing to despair, it's important to stop and look around and put everything into perspective instead of just focusing on the here and now as Elijah ended up doing in this text.

1 Kings 19:1-3 describes what Elijah was focused on. **Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2) So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." 3) Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ... He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." 5) Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. (NIV)**

How often don't we find ourselves in similar situations! The Lord has graciously shown his presence in our lives over and over again and then just when it seems as if all should be well, like Elijah we succumb to the Devil's temptations to despair of the Lord and his help in the face of a little bump in the road.

Elijah saw no reason to go on at this point – he understood that he was no better than his ancestors were. Was Elijah afraid because of the threat on his life? Was he being hard on himself because he had run away and failed to stand up for the Lord? Did he consider himself a failure because there were still those willing to follow the false god, Baal? Was there a particular sin or failure that overwhelmed him? Whatever it was, Elijah humbly admitted his unworthiness to be the Lord's servant.

The same God who granted Elijah his grace has granted us his grace. The same God who allowed Elijah to serve him allows us to serve him. But, like Elijah we sometimes become discouraged in our lives of service to the Lord. When our failures loom large, when we are feeling discouraged because of fear, sin, frustration or self-righteous pride we can count on the Lord's sustaining presence.

The Lord demonstrates his power in our lives in so many ways. He answers our prayers for daily bread by richly providing food and drink, clothing and shoes, house and home, money and goods, our families, friends and neighbors etc. even without our asking. He sends the Holy Spirit to call us to faith in his Son Jesus for whose sake all our sins are forgiven and in whose name we pray. With his Word and Sacrament, he preserves our faith and empowers us to live with him and for him.

When God lets us stumble, he does so that we may fall into his arms. When he lets us fail as his servants, he does so that we might lose faith in our own self and use his strength instead.

That is a lesson that Elijah learned in our text. When he was down and out and the Lord sent his angel to him to provide him with strength. **All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." 6) He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. 7) The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."**

As he had done in the past, the Lord took care of Elijah reminding that his grace is sufficient for him. God sent his holy angel to him as a ministering spirit. The writer to the Hebrews assures us that the Lord sends his angels as ministering servants to those who will inherit salvation. (Hebrews 1:14 NIV) The angels are one the many ways in which the Lord cares for us with his sustaining presence.

You've probably heard the phrase; "The Lord helps those who help themselves." You might even think it's in the Bible somewhere – **IT'S NOT!** The truth is that God helps those who cannot help themselves. Often he only lets us see that help after he lets us know in no uncertain terms that we cannot help ourselves. Even when we do not see or appreciate the help, it's there. Our Lord promises his children, "**Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.**" (Hebrews 13:5 NIV)

Those times of disappointment, frustration, despair and depression are used by the Lord for our blessing. They enter our lives so that we may be drawn closer to the Lord's grace and so that his grace may work in us and through us. Together with the Psalmist we can rejoice to proclaim, (Psalms 121:2 NIV) **My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.**

Indeed the Lord knows our needs and weaknesses and comes to our aid. He's the one who sent his Son to rescue us from sin, death and the power of the devil. And he is the one who has called us out of darkness into the wonderful light of the Gospel and Christ Jesus. Like Elijah, we have been blessed in many ways by our Lord. Through his Word and Sacrament, the Lord strengthens us when we are weak and empowers us to do his will.

3. The Lord will strengthen you to do his will

The apostle Peter reminds us that the reason the Lord preserves us, justifies us, and sanctifies us is so that we might declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9-10 NIV) **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10) Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

God had sent his angel to Elijah and provided Elijah with the assurance that the Lord was still concerned about him and that he still had work for him to do. Twice the angel encouraged Elijah to eat. Elijah rested following the first meal. And then, he was awakened again by the angel who encouraged him to eat once again.

So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. Elijah had prayed that he might die. The Lord heard his prayer and came to the aid of his discouraged prophet – strengthening him with food that enabled him to get up and move on. Elijah had thought he was alone and defeated, no longer of use to God or man. The Lord knew better. God was with him, God was giving him strength, and God still had a use for him.

Elijah's journey took him to Mount Horeb – sometimes called the mountain of God. This was the place where the Lord had given Moses the Law and his promises to bless his people. There the word of the Lord came to Elijah and the Lord revealed his presence to Elijah once more in preparation for Elijah's next act of service.

Time with the Lord, that's something that we all need not just in times of discouragement, but always -- time to listen to his precious Word and time to speak with him in prayer. With our prayers, we can share our concerns with the Lord together with our praises. When we spend time in his Word God speaks to us. In his Word, he assures us of his abiding presence. **God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."** (Hebrews 13:5 NIV) In his word, he announces his gracious forgiveness to us: **"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."** (Isaiah 1:18 NIV) And with his Word he empowers us to carry out his will in our lives: **"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."** (Isaiah 41:10 NIV)

Times of discouragement will come – the Lord is your strength in days of discouragement and always. Amen.