

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 16, 2015
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

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, 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." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." 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. 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." 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. (NIV)

Did you have a good week at work? Just wait...I'm sure right around the corner is one that is not so good. Is your marriage wonderful and magical right now....just wait (I especially tell this to newlyweds who are still in the honeymoon phase) there are going to be tough times and rocky roads in the relationship that aren't always so wonderful. For all our kids who are excited and eager to start school which I'm sure you all are....just wait....not every day at school is going to be fun. Have you been feeling really healthy and strong....just wait....days of weakness and sickness are coming. Oh, how I've learned this as a pastor of God's people when things go well here at church, when I see the Gospel working powerfully in people's lives, when I am filled with joy to witness fruits the Spirit...I just wait....then I get the phone call that steals away all my thunder or the text message that brings tears to my eyes.

Some say this is just life. But we understand it is much more than that – this is life in a sinful world. It is the way God said things would be from now on when Adam and Eve rebelled against Him in the Garden. There will be pain, and suffering, and sorrow, and sadness, and death. There will be the old evil foe still lurking behind every corner. There will be this world that wants to keep pulling us in and dragging us down. How many times have we found ourselves right here with Elijah sitting under the broom tree? Have we ever felt the weight of despair leading us to say with God's prophet: **"I have had enough, LORD!"** How often has this journey through what we call life been too much for you? Thankfully, Elijah was not alone even as he sat under the broom tree in the desert ready to die. Thankfully, neither are we alone. The awesome truth I want each of us to go home with today is this: **God's grace is your strength when the journey is too much for you.**

Elijah just didn't have a good day – he recently had a great day! In fact, if it wasn't the best it certainly had to be one the highlights of his ministry. In an awesome showdown on Mount Carmel between God and His prophet Elijah verses the false god Baal and 450 prophets of Baal, the Lord proved there was no contest. The prayers of those 450 prophets to Baal went unanswered. But God answered Elijah's prayer in a powerful way by sending fire from heaven which burned up the sacrifice, altar, and wood, and licked up the water in the trench. All the people cried **"The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!"** Elijah had the people seize and kill those 450 prophets of Baal. To top it off, Elijah is able to give Ahab the good news that the

terrible famine in Israel would end. Soon after Elijah spoke the Lord's Word a small cloud appeared and the rain was on the way.

Can you imagine the emotions of Elijah? He experienced a total victory. The people's cry must have kept ringing in his ears like beautiful victory chant: ***"The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!"*** Elijah probably thought for sure He would now have authority to teach and preach freely in Israel and that great reform would begin immediately throughout the land. He probably thought that surely all the people will follow His lead away from idols and back to the one true God. But just wait. And Elijah doesn't have to wait long to see the bottom drop out again. For when Ahab reports to his wicked wife Jezebel about what had taken place to the prophets of Baal, she 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."***

So instead of a warm and triumphant welcome back into his country, we are told: ***"Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 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." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep."*** Elijah ends up running for his life - again! He is afraid. He leaves the northern kingdom of Israel and heads south into Judah, the southern kingdom. But He doesn't stop there. After coming some 75 miles from his home to Beersheba at the southern end of Judah, he leaves his servant there and continues another 20 miles south into the desert.

Now alone, Elijah sits under a broom tree (more like a bush than a tree but large enough to provide shade) and he prays. ***"I have had enough, LORD...Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."*** Elijah feels like he is done and wants to die. He probably thought that all the teaching, preaching, warnings, miracles, and other work He did as a prophet was a big waste of time. He felt as if everything he did for the Lord was in vain. While this is an exaggerated cry of a weak and desperate man, there is some truth in his words when He says: ***"I am no better than my ancestors."*** This is true. Elijah was no better than them for he was a sinner too. This sinner was beginning to lose hope, was letting frustration get the best of him, and was starting to despair. So he lies under this broom tree and falls asleep.

Again, have you ever been with Elijah under that broom tree? Have you ever cried: ***"I have had enough, LORD?"*** Have you ever felt like all your work was for nothing? Ever think, even for a moment, like things would be better if you were not around...if you would just die? There is a trick the devil likes to play on us. If you have ever noticed Satan wants to stand when we should flee and he wants us to flee when we should stand. When it comes to sinful situations God wants us to flee and the devil says stand – *have a little fun you deserve it – keep looking on your computer at those inappropriate sites because no one is watching.* But then when God wants us to stand the devil keeps telling us to flee – *servicing God is not worth it why would you want to suffer like that – get out of your marriage it has become too much work and a hassle you don't need – take the easy way out.*

So it is here with Elijah. He is fleeing when God wants him to stand. When we join with Elijah in self pity, in frustration, in despair we too are listening to lies of the devil to get out, to run, and to flee. But the Lord wants us to stand. Thankfully, it is at those times the Lord gets us back onto our feet and makes us stand. Don't underestimate this simple thing God does for His prophet here. ***"All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." 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. 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." 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 doing more than just sending an angel and providing Elijah bread and water. The Lord is teaching Elijah an important lesson - an important lesson about grace, God's undeserved love. Especially, in these words "***Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.***" How true that is for Elijah! How true that is for us! The journey is too much for us. I can't make it on my own. Neither can you! But the lesson the Lord is teaching is that you don't have to, and I don't have to, and Elijah didn't have to! The Lord would provide for him – not just physical things like food and drink – He would provide everything his soul needs too. It is there at Horeb, the mountain of God that the Lord would speak to Elijah in that gentle whisper, the still small voice of the Gospel. There the Lord would pick Elijah up out of his despair and remind Elijah he is not alone in the good fight. He would tell Elijah to stand because the Lord still had work for him.

Think of the ways the Lord does for us what he did here for His prophet. Perhaps the Lord lifts us up with something as simple as a nice meal or a good night of sleep. Instead, of an angel perhaps God uses the kind words of a friend or encouragement of a family member. Most of all think of how the Lord uses His grace to bring us out of the depths of despair. He keeps pointing us to the love of Jesus. In the wider context of our Gospel lesson today a whole bunch of followers turn their backs on Jesus and leave? Do you know what Jesus does? He doesn't cry out in despair or flee like Elijah or like we so often do. Jesus stood and kept preaching and teaching God's Word.

For us and for our salvation Jesus always fled when the devil told him to stand and Jesus always stood when the devil told him to flee. So Jesus stood even when His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death in Gethsemane. The journey was not too much for Jesus even as every sin was placed upon His shoulders as He stumbled to His cross to die. Jesus did not flee when thorns were pushed into His head and the nails pounded into His hands and feet. Jesus did not ever cry out "***I have had enough Lord,***" even though God left Him all alone to suffer the wrath of hell our sins deserve. Jesus did not flee because He wanted to stand in victory over His grave, and our Savior wanted you and I to be able to stand in victory over ours! So now because Jesus lived for you, and died for you, and rose again all your sins are forgiven and the apostle Paul can tell you: "***Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.***" (1 Corinthians 15). It wasn't in vain for Elijah. It is never in vain for us. So when the journey is too much for you...just wait...your strength is coming...if fact it is always there for you in God's grace! Amen.