



Roanoke, Virginia

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“Get Up, Eat, and Go”

I Kings 19:4-15a

Rev. Elizabeth N.H. Link

Introduction:

In 1 Kings 17-18, to use a phrase from “The Simpsons,” everything is coming up Milhouse for Elijah. He has been performing miracles, raising the dead from their graves, calling lightning down from heaven, and confronting the monarchy and the followers of Baal. As chapter 19 opens, nearly all of Israel has turned away from Baal toward Yahweh. Ahab and Jezebel, however, still cling to their idols. When Jezebel learns Elijah has ordered the execution of her gods’ prophets, she orders Elijah’s execution. She brazenly promises to kill him within 24 hours.

It is Queen Jezebel’s charge that sets Elijah into motion toward Horeb/Sinai (1 Kings 19:2-3). He’s fleeing for his life. Tradition associates this desert in a special way with the presence of God, and Elijah needs to talk to God.

I Kings 19:4-15a:

⁴ But [Elijah] 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.’ ⁵Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, ‘Get up and eat.’ ⁶He 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. ⁷The 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.’ ⁸He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.



⁹At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' ¹⁰He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'

¹¹ He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' ¹⁴He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.' ¹⁵Then the LORD said to him, 'Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus...'

Sermon:

It is enough now, O Lord.

Yesterday, we held a memorial service for Edie Naughton. I believe it was our first memorial service since the end of January. It certainly hasn't been our first death in that time. Since the start of the pandemic, we have lost, in addition to Edie, George Wilson, Bill Erwin, Dick Baynton, Ruth Ellen Kuhnel, Lynn Avis, Martha Kessler, and Mickey Nelson—I apologize if there are others I am leaving out. And this list doesn't include your own family members who have passed in recent months. Our weekly concerns list feels physically heavy. And I think the weight of it is so great because we haven't had the familiar markers of bedside visits and full-sanctuary memorial services we are used to. Our grief and our anxiety for still more ill loved ones leaves us feeling helpless and alone.

It is enough now, O Lord.

Heartache is sure to visit each one of us some time or another. No person is immune. Sometimes our suffering is personal and private, like Elijah's in the desert. Other times, our suffering assumes global proportions. We need look no further than the recent news about the pandemic and the racial injustices that have plagued our nation from its beginning.

Such trials test the faith of even the most mature saints.

In 2007, a posthumous autobiography of Mother Teresa called, *Come Be My Light*, was published. Some people called her a fraud or even a closet atheist for the confessions found within the personal correspondence inside. In numerous letters, which Mother Teresa repeatedly begged her superiors to destroy, she described her experiences of profound spiritual darkness that haunted her for fifty years. She writes that she didn't practice what she preached, and laments the stark contrast between her exterior demeanor and her interior desolation: "The smile is a big cloak which



covers a multitude of pains.... My cheerfulness is a cloak by which I cover emptiness and misery.... I deceive people with this weapon.”

She describes the absence of God’s presence in many ways—as an emptiness, a loneliness, a spiritual dryness, or lack of consolation. “There is so much contradiction in my soul, no faith, no love, no zeal.... I find no words to express the depths of the darkness.... My heart is so empty.... I don’t pray any longer.... I have no faith, I don’t believe.” She rebukes herself as a hypocrite for teaching her sisters one thing while experiencing something far different.

Many people viewed this disparity between her private struggle with faith and her public ministry and work as a self-contradiction. But Mother Theresa is not the only saint to have described her struggles with brutal honesty and her experiences of near despair. Scripture is full of similar examples. We need only open our Bibles right to the middle to find psalm after psalm relating experiences of doubt, spiritual isolation, and anxiety.

John of the Cross, in the 16th century made famous the phrase that has found its way into our ordinary lexicon—the “dark night of the soul.” And the 19th century French Carmelite nun Therese of Lisieux told her sisters, when speaking of her own spiritual desolation, “If you only knew what darkness I am plunged into.”

When Jezebel threatened to murder Elijah, Elijah rightly feared for his life. He fled to the desert where he hoped to die. This scene from our text comes just after Elijah has done mighty deeds and successfully defended Yahweh before the masses. I Kings says that Elijah “came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: ‘It is enough; now, O LORD....’”

My husband Chris shared a meme with me last night that reads something to the effect of, “I’m beginning to think ‘hindsight is 2020’ was some kind of message from a future time traveler that we all misunderstood.”

I don’t need to tell you that 2020 has been full of disappointments. But what’s surprising are the so many varied ways I can be disappointed. Yes, I’m disappointed in missing the traditional ways we gather—to learn, to worship, to grieve, and to celebrate. But never could I have imagined this season would leave me so disappointed in broken systems that break the very people they are meant to serve. I have felt sad and disappointed; I have felt angry and ashamed. It is enough, now, O Lord.

I get it. I get why Elijah fled the looming threats and retreated to the desert. I get why he plopped down underneath that solitary tree with his solitary desolation and exhaustedly sighed, “It is enough, now, O Lord.”

And then God does what God always does. God shows up. Like the old psalm says, “There is nowhere [we] can flee from your presence. There is nowhere we can go from your Spirit” (Ps. 139). Elijah retreated into the desert where he hoped to die, and then angels show up with food.

Has an angel ever shown up on your doorstep with food? It happens—both literally and figuratively. And so, Elijah slept and ate, and slept and ate.



“Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you,” the angel said.

And then a voice told Elijah to make his way to the mountain of God. Once there, he entered a cave where the word of God spoke to him. “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Elijah answered with the hardest parts of his story, from the pit of his despair, having a bit of a pity party—it’s ok, Elijah, we can relate.

And then God speaks, but not in the way Elijah expected.

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

John of the Cross (the very same “dark night of the soul” guy) wrote that “silence is God’s first language.” My favorite translation of this passage from I Kings describes that sound of sheer silence as “the calm, whispering voice.” After the spectacles of the mighty wind, the shattering earthquake, and the raging fire, there was this calm, whispering voice.

When someone speaks in a whisper, you have to lean in close to hear.

How closely are we listening? How far are we leaning in? A poet once said, “We are what we do with our attention.” Whatever holds our attention holds a lot of power. Our attention is a crucial resource.

Often, our listening is at the surface of things. We hear what we want to hear. We hear what we expect to hear. But if we are really turning our attention on God, we may in fact hear what God is saying to us.

Interestingly, our text doesn’t exactly say that God had nothing to do with the wind, earthquake, and fire, but it does remind us that God is often in the places we least expect to find God—like in the silence of life.

After all of this desert and deserted time, God tells Elijah to go back where he came from. “Go back, Elijah, there is more for you to do.”

God sends Elijah back into the fray from which he fled. God’s speaking in the silence is a reminder that Elijah is not, was not ever, alone. God send Elijah back to the faithful followers of God that wait for God’s direction. And God sends Elijah back to anoint his successor Elisha. Elijah may have been ready to give it all up under that broom tree back there, “It is enough, now, O Lord,” but somehow God’s presence *is* enough. God has a future for Elijah and for God’s people.

Like the prophet of old, God is with us, and God speaks to us still. It is hard to do the work of living faithfully in our time—of discerning what the right path forward is for ourselves and for our families. How do we keep safe? What choices are we making that will affect others? It is hard



to walk the wilderness journey of learning our nation's history and pulling back the curtain to see injustice, prejudice, and hate. Where do we begin to recognize our role in the things that divide us? How do we respond to Jesus' command to love God and love neighbor in a world that tells us to look out for ourselves as though our neighbor doesn't exist?

I am right there with you, brothers and sisters, doing the hard work of leaning in and paying attention.

Somewhere in the midst of the storms swirling around us, God is speaking. We had better listen. We are not alone. And somehow, that is enough.

Please pray with me.

Holy God,

Speak to us once more. Help us to drown out the storms that work to distract us. Help us to attune our attention on you. Make yourself known to us. Guide our hearts and open our ears to truly listen—to pay attention—so that we might hear and follow. Make us brave enough to see the truth that your presence is enough. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

