

1 Kings 19:4-8

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." 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, otherwise 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.

John 6:35, 41-51

Jesus said to the people, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

“To Hold Enough”

I think most of us have probably had an experience where we felt like Elijah in today's reading. We recognize the place he finds himself - overwhelmed and feeling alone, and at the end of his rope, the end of his energy and his ability to keep trying, or even to cope. When he says, "It is enough, O Lord," what he means is "the suffering is enough, the trials are enough, because my resources are not enough, I am not enough; God, you have not been enough for me in this situation." That's what he is really saying. I haven't measured up to the expectations, and I've got nothing left and I want to give up.

That is the feeling I think most of us can relate to. We are too often bombarded with the message that we are not enough and don't have enough. We live in a culture with a mindset of scarcity when it comes to so many things. We do not have enough energy, not enough time, not enough sleep, not enough money, not enough patience. The expectations are great and our resources meager. It is the modern plight, to live with the anxiety that there is something lacking. But that false feeling is killing us. It is depriving us of joy, of peace, and in a very real sense it is depriving us of our potential, and it is depriving the world of the full extent of our gifts that God created us with.

A couple of weeks ago I read an article exactly to this point about the effects of scarcity on people's brains. It was written by a Harvard economic psychologist. He found that when people are confronted with scarcity they operate at fourteen points below their natural IQ. I'm not saying that if you are sleep deprived or starving your brain doesn't work as well. Everyone knows that. And it wasn't claiming that people who grow up in perpetual poverty go on to be less adept or successful. The article was claiming that when all people are confronted with a situation of scarcity, when that feeling of fear and dread come over them - like they don't know where their next meal is coming from, or they must pay for a repair to their car that they cannot afford but without the car they cannot do their job, or they can't possibly get done all that they need to do within the timeframe they are given to do it - that those problems take up so much brain-space that all of their other cognitive abilities are affected, all of their decisions are compromised. The very same persons, when they fall into an overwhelming mindset of scarcity, of there is not enough and there is not going to be enough, function well below their own capacities - robbing themselves and everyone else of their potential. The fear of not enough is truly sucking life out of the situation.

This is more about the mindset than the actual lack of resources. I've seen it even among the wealthy. I used to live in one of the wealthiest zip codes in America. My neighbors were the Wall Street elite. These were people who seemed to have everything, but because they operate in a world that drives towards extravagant abundance as the answer to scarcity, they were taught that whatever they had was not enough. Would their bonus be enough to cover the extra expenses this year? Were they doing enough to get their kids into the best schools? Were they working hard enough to keep their job in a cutthroat environment? It was a world of constant striving whose drive was more akin to those in desperate need than to those who rested in the comfort of their financial security. I've seen the cost of living in the world where there is never enough. That price is perpetual anxiety, the lack of peace, and the loss of the full potential of

what God created you to be and a beloved creature. The answer to scarcity is not striving for abundance, because abundance is never abundant enough. The only remedy is learning to rest in the comfort of enough. That is what Elijah learns in the passage. The angel does not spread before him an abundant feast. The angel gives him bread and water, but it is sufficient for the journey. He simply has what he needs, is refreshed, and continues on, knowing that he is cared for by God's all-sufficiency.

Dr. Brene Brown, the research professor in sociology at the University of Houston, recent Episcopalian, and TED talk celebrity, wrote the book *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. In it she gives us this bit of wisdom: "Sufficiency is not two steps up from poverty or one step short of abundance. It isn't a measure of barely enough or more than enough. Sufficiency is not an amount at all; it's an experience. It's a context that we generate, a declaration of faith, a knowing that there is enough, that God is enough, and that we are enough. It is that something more that is just beyond our earthly vision, called faith. "

And faith here, what we mean by faith in this instance, is about an encounter with a person - the person of Jesus. And the experience of resting in the fact that that person is enough. In this gospel passage we read today, Jesus is saying- I am enough. I am the bread of life - I am sustenance itself. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Rest peacefully in that promise, that assurance.

Notice he says that you will never be hungry or thirsty, not that you will have more than you could ever eat, or more than you could possibly count in a lifetime. This is not a message of prolific abundance. That is not how God works, because God wants the constancy of the relationship that comes from you and me resting in God being enough, not ourselves and our own resources being enough. Jesus came into the world to help people understand in terms that they could grasp that God has always been operating like. The same God that provided for Elijah in the wilderness shows up in the person of Jesus, and says I am that life-sustaining bread. Eat and be filled for the journey. Have what you need for this earthly pilgrimage. Live fully into the promise that I will provide and care for you always.

I am reminded of this beautiful prayer in the Prayer Book. It is found in the section of extra prayers near the end, and it is a general thanksgiving that we don't often have occasion to pray together. In it we are taught to pray: "We thank you for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ." God satisfies and delights, and when we are disappointed and find ourselves lacking we come again to the place of dependency and find God's own son providing for us even there. It is a powerful prayer by which we should shape our lives and the way we see the world, because if we believe it and live into it, it dispels anxiety and grants us that peace that marks the experiences of knowing that we have enough.

Jesus is still coming into the world, breaking into our lives on a regular basis, amidst our fears and our wanting, filling the holes and feeding the hunger, and trying to tell you and me that he is enough. And where we are reminded of that most tangibly is in the Eucharist, when we experience the bread of life and our hunger and thirst is dispelled, not by morsel of bread and sip of wine, but by the encounter of the all-sufficient grace of God.

It is the mark of our modern world to live with anxiety, to be beset with the mindset of scarcity. That is why we do this every single week, without fail - to be reminded that the bread of life came down from heaven so that we might be filled. So come to the table and experience the grace of enough. Come, put out your hands, and know what it is like to hold enough. Come and be caught up in the all-sufficiency of Christ, and then go on your journey this week and rest in it. Amen.