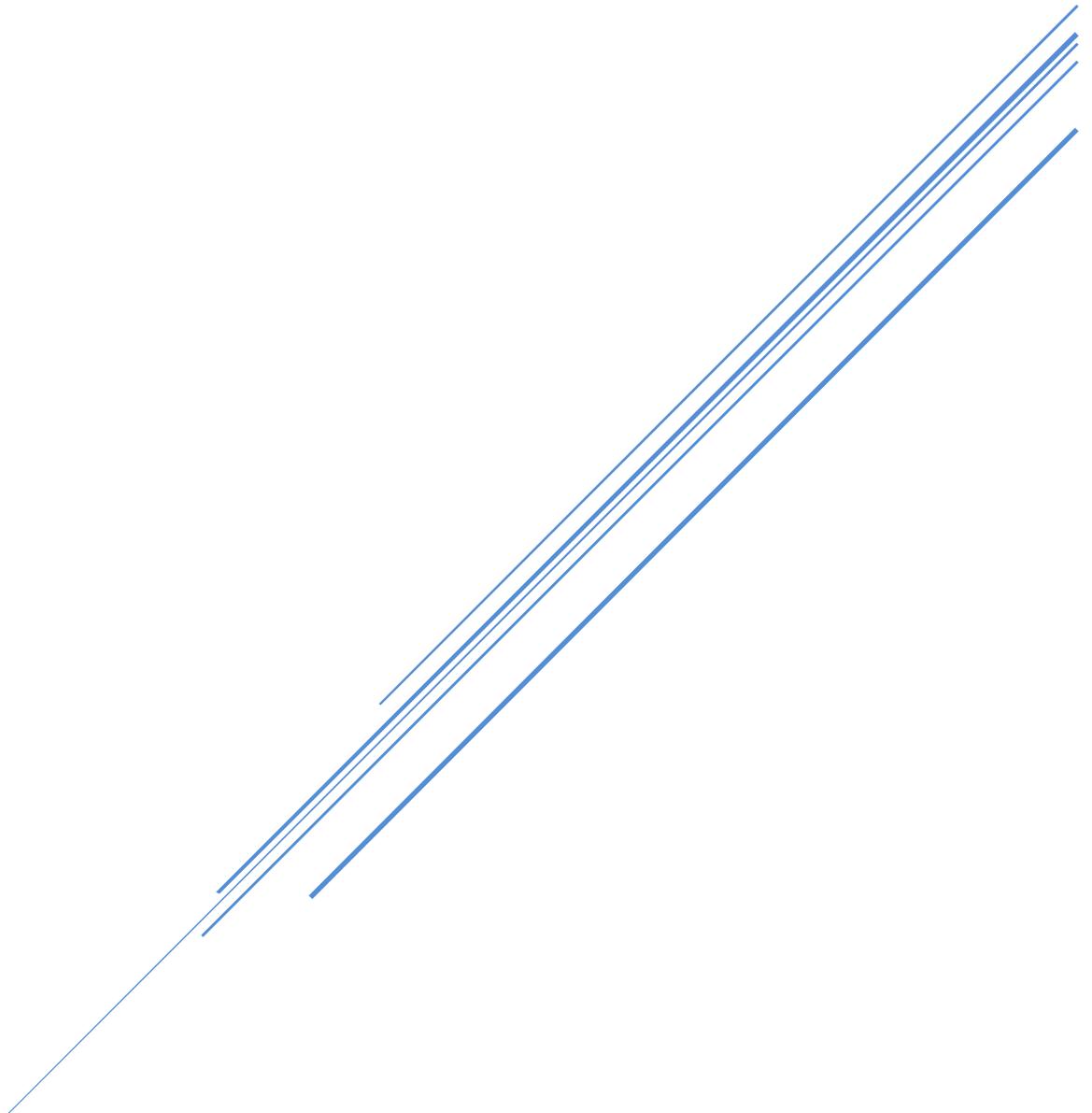


# GET UP & EAT

*1 Kings 19:1-9*



June 19, 2016  
BCUMC/TCUMC/CCUMC

I don't know if you caught that or not. I know I hardly noticed myself, but then I thought about it, and I thought about Elijah, and I thought about my own life struggles and challenges, and I realized this story is just as relevant today, and to us, as it ever was.

Elijah – the great prophet of God – maybe the greatest prophet in the entire Hebrew Bible – was under a broom tree, scared, depressed, and wanting to die. Elijah! “It’s enough; Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.”

Just the day before Elijah had had one of the best days of his career – probably one the best days of his life – crushing the followers of the pagan god Baal in an unprecedented competition – not seen before or since.

“My God is bigger than your God,” boasts Elijah, and to prove it, Elijah proposed a challenge that goes something like this: I’ll build an altar over here – you build an altar over there. I’ll get a bull – you get a bull. I’ll cut my bull in half and lay him on the altar – you cut your bull in half and lay him on your altar. Then we’ll each pray to our respective god, and whichever god ends down flames first, wins!

The Baal priests agree, so...

Elijah builds an altar over here – the Baal guys build an altar over there. Elijah gets a bull – the Baal guys get a bull. Elijah cuts his bull in half and lays him on his altar – the Baal guys cut their bull in half and lay him on their altar.

And so begins the great altar competition of 846 BCE.

Baal’s people start calling on their god, and calling on their god; and after a few hours of chanting and singing, whooping and hollering -- oh, and praying...there’s not a lick of fire to be seen anywhere.

Elijah, over here with his back against his altar, sits watching the spectacle like he’s at a Saturday afternoon blues concert in the park. Probably enjoying a glass of wine or a warm beer (these were primitive times – beer but no refrigeration). Elijah starts heckling. “Hey Baal guys! What’s up? Is your god asleep? Oh, maybe he’s on vacation!”

Of course that doesn’t help, and eventually the Baal guys get frustrated ‘cuz there’s no fire, and in their attempts to show their sincerity and devotion, “...as was

their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them.” That’s what the NRSV says, “...until blood gushed out over them,” – Ew.

So now there’s blood everywhere. People are wailing and carrying on and finally Elijah says, “Enough!” I don’t know if they even waited for the bleeding to stop, but Elijah motions to the Baal guys -- and everyone else -- and he says, “Psst! Come ‘ere. Watch this!”

I don’t have to tell you that our great prophet of God knew full well that God would come through; God always comes through! And it would have been easy enough (if not uncharacteristically understated) to just pray a simple prayer and God would have turned Elijah’s altar into the towering inferno!

But not Elijah... oh, no. In a stunning act of showmanship – we do like to sort of add our own touches to God’s plans, don’t we – with all the bravado and panache of PT Barnum, Elijah has his assistants dig a giant trench around his altar and soak the altar with water. Then soak it again. And again until even the trench was filled!

Then Elijah takes a step back, raises his arms in the air in a posture of prayer and says in a loud stage whisper something like, “OK God – do your thing.” And “Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench.” What a show!

The Baal guys are all slaughtered and another day in the life a great prophet comes to a close, and that was that.

Can you imagine being Elijah at that moment in time? How great must that have felt for him? How would you feel? Being the one who conducts God’s well-orchestrated production – especially after adding your own personal touches and theatrics?

I can just imagine Elijah later that night, thinking, “Wow, God really did work through me! Wow!” And he would’ve prayed something like, “I guess it’s you and me God! Look what a great team we are! And thanks for making me so awesome! We should take this show on the road, God! And everybody could see me – you, I mean - - you working through me, I mean...”

But Elijah’s dreams of stardom come to a screeching and dramatic halt when Baal follower and queen, Jezebel, sends word to Elijah that because he killed all of her Baal priests, she planned to kill him within the next 24 hours. “Off with his head!”

And the same Elijah, who just yesterday had a banner production day with God, loses it! One little threat from the Queen and he's completely undone. So, afraid for his life, he runs into the wilderness. What a difference a day makes, right?

But I think I get it. Don't you? I've had glorious experiences with God one day, and then the next day I'm questioning again – and scared. And running. And all the things I saw God do the day before? It's like they never even happened. I can't be too hard on Elijah, I've been there. I understand. I've run into the wilderness myself a time or two. Haven't you?

Where's your wilderness? Or should I say, what is your wilderness? We all have them. We escape into the wilderness of TV, or the internet, or shopping, or working, or drinking, or using drugs, or working out, or eating, or sleeping – feel free to add your own... The wilderness is where we go to run from stress, or fear, or worry, or to manage our anger.

I had a roommate years ago whose wilderness thing was cleaning. When she was mad about something – or someone! – she'd clean. And she'd clean and she'd clean.... God help whoever might make the mistake of coming in while she was doing it! I quickly learned that if I came home to the smell of pine-sol, I should just back out the door slowly.

But how long can you keep that kind of intensity going? I know I can only clean for so long.... But seriously, you can only watch so many games, or drink, or eat, or work, or work out for so long. Sooner or later you run out of gas and it's over.

That's just what happened to Elijah. After a day of running (some of us stay in our wilderness much longer than a day, I must say!), but after a day of running, Elijah is tired. He's thirsty, he's scared, and he's hopeless.

Sound familiar to anyone? It does to me... We can run ourselves ragged into whatever wilderness we choose, but in the end we still can't see any way out. And even if we did, we don't have the energy or the motivation to even WANT to work it out. So we lay on the couch, feeling sorry for ourselves; scared, frustrated, hopeless, pitiful really, thinking, "I quit. I give up. I'm so over all of this. I can't. I just cant...."

Or, for Elijah – he lays down under the broom tree and says to God, "Take my life. Just kill me now. I am done." Which, by the way, is exactly what I said to God just before I quit drinking. And we cry ourselves to sleep -- I mean Elijah cries himself to sleep. It's the only peace he can find and so he takes it.

But God doesn't leave us there. God doesn't leave Elijah there. God doesn't say, "Oh, there, there; you've had a hard day – week – year. Get some rest."

No – instead, God let's Elijah sleep a little and then sends an angel to wake him up, saying simply: "Get up, Elijah. Eat something."

Now, I don't know about you, but if I were Elijah... and I had just run myself ragged for a day in the wilderness, and finally got to sleep. I might be just a little annoyed at being disturbed. "Get up?!?! Are you kidding? I just got to sleep! And besides, God, didn't you hear me tell you I'm done? Leave me alone!"

Leave me alone.

But Elijah does get up. He eats the bread and he drinks the water, but he's not through yet. I had a friend that used to say, "go ahead, have a pity party! Wallow in it. Then get up and do what you need to do."

When Elijah finishes breakfast, he just lays back down. I like this guy!

So the angel wakes him again, "Come on Elijah, get up. Get and eat – or the journey will be too much for you."

The bread and water remind us of the Eucharist – our own communion banquet – because, you see, Elijah wasn't done yet. His journey with God wasn't over, and he would need strength to continue. Beginning with a 40-day hike to Mt Horeb.

But notice this as well: God didn't send an angel to yell at Elijah, or to tell him he shouldn't feel scared or discouraged, or to say, "Hey, don't you trust God? Weren't you there yesterday with the water and the fire? What – did you all of a sudden forget how powerful God is? Where's your faith?"

God doesn't guilt us. We never hear a tsk tsk of disappointment from God – we can do that fine without any help from God!

There are a couple of reasons I think God sent that angel. One, it's a sign that God was still present with Elijah. Elijah was never alone, and he was protected. Whatever Jezebel had planned for him, God would faithfully see him through it.

The second reason was to supply Elijah with everything he would need for what was coming – a 40-day hike to the mountain – to let Elijah know that there was a 'next.'

So get this – we can come to a place in our journey, or our call, or our lives, where things don't look like we thought they would – like we hoped they would. We have one version of what our life or specific call is supposed to look like, but God, clearly, has another. And I'm not sure I like that. It's uncomfortable and scary. I don't like uncertainty. And I don't like anything too difficult or, God forbid, painful.

But once we realize that God has placed a call on all our lives, and we say 'yes' to that call, we'll never be done! Not as long as we're on this earth. Our call isn't over until God says so and we get to go home. Until then, all of us, no matter what our age, or health, or ability, or energy level... we all have vibrant, vital ministry to do.

All of us, no matter what our age, or health, or ability, or energy level have something unique to add to the Kingdom, even if we don't know what it is, yet.

Does that mean we'll never be afraid or tired or want to just climb back under the covers and say, "I'm done, God. I just...cant." No...

It just means that life isn't always what we plan. Our journey with God sometimes calls us to do things or be things that we might not want to, or never imagined. There will be times when things get scary. But we can learn through Elijah that when things do get scary – when the road gets hard -- it's ok to be afraid, or frustrated. It's even ok to feel like giving up.

But know this: Know that when you can't take one more step, God can. You're not alone. Know that God sends angels to minister to your needs – all the time! That angel challenges you, even now, "Get up, and eat. You'll need your strength for what's coming..." (uh-oh!).

It's perfectly OK to feel uncertain, but take the nourishment God offers, because no matter how it feels, or what you've lost, or what you've done, God has a plan. And even if you think you've messed up the plan – God is flexible.

You're not done, yet, Elijah. Get up. Eat.

Amen.