

# Sermon: A Nap and a Snack

June 19, 2022

1 Kings 19:1-15

Luke 8:26-39

*by Eric Anderson*

Confession time: “A Nap and a Snack” is a completely unoriginal phrase in relation to this text. I cannot count the number of people, and I certainly cannot identify the person who first said something like: the angel’s gifts to Elijah conclusively demonstrate the benefits and the divine blessings of a nap and a snack.

All this desperation and impoverishment and fear came at an odd time in the life and prophetic career of Elijah. He’d just had a major triumph. He’d asked God for a big, showy miracle in front of King Ahab and the priests of Baal. God had delivered in a big, showy way. Elijah had placed a sacrifice on a makeshift altar, then soaked its wood with water. God had sent a fire that lit the wood, consumed the meat on the wood, and actually shattered the stones of the altar. This had broken a years-long drought in the land.

Elijah had triumphed.

Except that the queen had not been present, and one of the things Elijah had done was to kill the priests of Baal, which is not an act I commend. To Queen Jezebel, these were her priests; Baal was her God. She sent word to Elijah that his death was next. Elijah fled.

Roger Nam writes at Working Preacher, “This passage presents such a radically different view of Elijah. We see the prophet in his humanity like never before and really never again. Although the Bible is often prone to hyperbole, I take his extreme fear, severe depression, and suicidal ideations as they are — accurate and understandable. This same prophet who boldly stands against kings is now driven to his lowest point, the man of God is still a mere man.”

So much for triumph. Or at least so much for triumphalism. I’ve rarely experienced a success that wasn’t mixed with some regret or some anxiety or some concern about what came next. Part of that is due to my need to curb my pride – that’s not something everyone faces, but I do. Successes also come with new obligations, though. Ask our friend the Rev. Jonathan Roach, whose installation as Associate Conference Minister we celebrated in this sanctuary on Tuesday. It was an evening of great joy – but it was also an evening that confirmed him in work that is often difficult, sometimes taxing, and occasionally impossible. As anyone who has received a job they’ve applied for knows, and for that matter on father’s day as every parent knows: be careful what you ask for.

Christianity in general is subject to triumphalism, and as a result has not just strayed from but at times betrayed its core principles and the teachings of Jesus. The “divine right of kings” is theological tripe. The notion of a crusade, a divinely commanded war of aggression against other people, is simply horrific. American exceptionalism, the idea that God has given the United States of America unique gifts of righteousness and wisdom, is impious nonsense. The various theological defenses of racism, sexism, and preemptive violence by Christians over the centuries are, one and all, harmful to the spirit as well as fatal to the body of society and the bodies of society’s members.

Elijah did not seem grateful to be freed from the hubris of triumphalism – and I’m afraid he doesn’t seem to have reconsidered the decision to murder the priests of Baal. He fled from nation of Israel, but he didn’t stop when he came to Judah, where he ought to have been safe. He went on into the wilderness, where his fear of death turned almost suicidal, as he asked God that he might die. He went on to find the mountain where God had given Moses the tablets of the Law – which for some reason was known as Mount Horeb to Jews of the northern kingdom of Israel and as Mount Sinai to Jews of the southern kingdom of Judah. It’s almost Exodus in reverse.

As Sara Koenig writes at Working Preacher, “Here, we see Elijah’s internal struggle, his fears and doubts, and his private withdrawal into the wilderness. But this chapter is not only about the prophet. It is also about the God who meets Elijah and responds to him in the particulars of his situation: providing for his needs, and ultimately redirecting him.”

It’s about the God who brought Elijah a snack, and told him to take a nap, and then did it again, so that he’d have the strength to reach Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai.

I think it’s pretty clear from the list of instructions that Elijah eventually received that God was not enthusiastic about Elijah’s abrupt departure from Israel. When you’re in the place that you’re supposed to be, God doesn’t tend to ask questions like, “What are you doing here?” Not just once. Twice. “What are you doing here, Elijah?” God didn’t seem to like Elijah’s answer either time.

But.

Along the way, God made certain to fulfill Elijah’s basic needs. God kept Elijah going despite the prophet’s failure to meet responsibilities. God kept Elijah going despite his frustrating whining. God kept Elijah going despite his abdication of his kuleana.

A nap and a snack. And a nap and a snack again.

Life, the life of faith, the life seeking righteousness, the life seeking to do good, is not a sprint. If we want to use a racing analogy, life is a marathon. In fact, it’s a relay marathon, which I suspect is not included in running competitions because how long would it take and when

would it end? A few years ago I found myself handing out cups of water to runners in Volcano. Most of them didn't stop, but they took that refreshment because it kept them going. People who fly planes and guide ships and drive trucks are required to take rest and nourishment because the human body can't keep going forever without it. Tired hungry people don't have the reaction time that fed and alert people do. God knows this. God knew it when Elijah laid down his body and his spirit under the broom tree.

There is so much out there that demands our attention and concern. Our families' needs are being stressed by inflation, by breakdowns in the delivery of goods, and by the particular circumstances of each household. The American experiment has not yet delivered on its promise of equal justice and equal opportunity for all citizens. Wars on the far side of the globe have raised both fuel and food costs. There is a shortage of the hot sauce called Sriracha because of a drought in Mexico. That drought is most likely a symptom of global climate change.

If you're feeling overwhelmed and looking for a broom tree, I don't blame you. If you'd like to go find that cave on the slopes of Mount Horeb, I don't blame you for that, either.

But listen to these words from Cheryl Lindsay at [ucc.org](http://ucc.org):

"I had a conversation after the mass shooting at a school in Uvalde with someone who said, 'I just don't know what we can do.' I've been sitting with that because, at the time she said it, I immediately thought of at least half a dozen things that can be done. They have been documented and reported for years. You can even find memes on social media that can tell you what can address this problem. I had, in the course of our discussion, noted at least four separate initiatives that we could adopt as best practices from other countries who have little gun violence. That conversation reminded me that it's often easier to claim helplessness or adopt a fatalistic attitude than to do the thing we don't want to do even if it will net the results that we desire."

This sermon is, in part, a caution. You can flee out into the wilderness away from the commitments you've made. You can seek God's aid and you can pour out the sorrows of your heart before the LORD. God will listen. But – and this is the caution – God will not let you stay there. God will give you the next assignment. God will expect you to take up your spot in the great relay race.

This sermon is also a promise. No single one of us has to do it all. No prophet – not even Elijah, who God reassured was among thousands – no prophet is alone. No Christian is alone. No Christian gets abandoned when they get weary. No Christian gets ignored by God because they're hungry and thirsty and frustrated and exhausted. There is a nap and a snack for the journey. There is strength from God to go on.

Amen.