

Eat Up

a sermon
by Dan Griswold
Trinity Reformed Church
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I Kings 19:4–8

Psalm 34:1–8

This month and into the first Sunday of September, my sermons here all have something to do with food... which may mean that for these few weeks, by the time church is over, or maybe well before, you might be hungry.

You'll be dreaming of food.

You'll be hankering for a little sumthin-sumthin.

You'll be rushing up to the Fellowship Hall for a nibble, or zooming out of the parking lot for lunch.

You're welcome.

I know, you're a nice enough bunch. But I wouldn't dare stand between you and a cookie. There's a lot about food in the Bible. So many of its narratives,

its lessons,
its stories,
its images,
its metaphors and symbols,

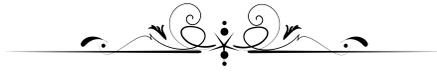
have to do

with eating and dining,
feasting and fasting.
planting and harvesting;
with the search for food,
the finding of food,
the sharing of food;
with hunger and thirst,
of the body
and of the soul.

As I see it, this is neither accidental nor irrelevant. I think it means something that the Bible again and again speaks of food and drink.

Because these are gifts of God. Without them we cannot live. In them we take great delight. It seems so right that God would be understood in metaphors of food, and would be revealed in images of shared meals.

*O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.*



Elijah was tired. He was afraid. He was depressed.

He was ... a mess.

Which is kind of strange. Because only a few days before, Elijah had been riding high. God had given him a great victory. In a contest between Elijah, on the one side, and four hundred and fifty prophets of the false god Baal, on the other, the obvious winner was Elijah. Or rather, the winner was God, whom Elijah served. And God showed for all to see that the so-called god served by those other prophets

was no god all,
did not exist at all,
was only a wish,
a dream,
a figment.

But after this great contest, which Elijah had won — or rather which God had won vindicating both God and Elijah — there was some push-back.

Jezebel.

Yes, Queen Jezebel:

the cruel,
the wicked,
the threat from afar become the cancer within,
who craved power and fouled religion
and used them both to wound and warp and destroy.

That Jezebel.

Jezebel was furious:

furious at the defeat of her prophets,
furious at the assault on her god,
furious at Elijah,
furious *with* Elijah.

And in her fury she promised to kill him.

So Elijah ran. He ran for his life. He ran far out into the wilderness, away from Jezebel, and toward Horeb, the mountain of God.

Now in his running, in his fear, I'm not sure what Elijah had expected. Did he really think it would be so easy? Did he really think there would be no push-back? Did he really think that with the victory of that contest it would all now be over, and then he could kick back and relax?

I mean, *who does that?*

And this wild change in mood, this sudden veering from high to low, from elation to despair? *Who does that?*

“Asking for a friend.”

Which is to say, of course *many* of us do that! And if not you, then someone you know well — a friend, a spouse, a child.

This is common, *so* common. This is human, *so* human. To ping-pong from one emotional state to another, to be several of the seven dwarfs all at once, or Tigger and Eeyore and Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet and Christopher Robin at the very same time, reacting to the challenges of life with a jumble of responses covering the emotional and logical gamut: *this is what we do*.

But for Elijah, it went deeper than it usually does for most of us. Because he feared that after all he had done, all his work, all his risk, that his country was still corrupt, and his people were just as faithless as they had been. They were still a people who gleefully disobeyed God. They were still faithless, joyless, loveless, merciless, hate-filled men and women with far more interest in their neighbors' entertaining and attractive gods

of sex
and war
and nature
and planets

than in the one true God,

the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob,
the God of Moses,
the God who had freed their enslaved ancestors,
the God who had given them the Law,
the God who had given them their land,
the God who made them
and loved them
and blessed them
and called them to be God's own holy people.

And so Elijah felt like a failure. All that work, all that risk, and still it all appeared to have been for nothing. He had failed, just as so many before him had failed.

*It is enough; now, O LORD,
take away my life,
for I am no better than my ancestors.*



The road ahead appeared so hard. Even after all that had happened, all that he had done. He didn't think he could go on.

After his cry of despair, he collapsed, not into a comfy bed with fluffy pillows and sheets made of finest cotton, not in a beautiful room in a bed & breakfast appointed with Victorian furniture and cachets of potpourri, but plopping down on the ground Elijah fell asleep under a scraggly tree offering the scarcest of shelter.

"Wake up," the angel said. "Eat up," the angel said.

What could he eat? He's in the wilderness.
Ah, there it is. Within arm's reach, a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water.
The gifts of God, for the people of God.
So Elijah ate, and he drank, and he slept again.
It happens again.
"Wake up," the angel said. "Eat up," the angel said.
Again, within arm's reach, a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water.
The gifts of God, for the people of God.
Elijah needed rest. He needed food.
God knew this, and provided.
Elijah needed rest. He needed food. And then he could go on.
A second serving!
Eat up!



I know. There are times when you despair.
I know. There are times when you feel that your work has been for nothing.
I know.
You need rest.
You need food.
I know. There's no possibility of going on until you have these, the rest, and the food.
And then an angel touches your shoulder.
"Wake up," the angel says. "Eat up," the angel says.
Within arm's reach, a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water.
The gifts of God, for the people of God.
And then,

because the journey is long,
and the journey is challenging,
even as the journey is for the glory of God,

the blessing of rest and nourishment comes again. A second serving!
"Wake up," the angel says. "Eat up," the angel says.
Within arm's reach, a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water.
The gifts of God, for the people of God.
Eat up!



Sometimes, we refuse the rest, and we decline the food. "No thanks, I'm good," we say, or act as if we say.
But God wants us to eat up.
Sometimes, we behave like we are not needy, not hungry, not thirsty.

But we are. And God wants us to eat up.

We pretend that we are not mortal, that we have no limits.

But we are, and we do. And God wants us to eat up.

We forget that we have bodies needing nourishment, and we are unaware that our souls are akin to bodies in that they, too, need nourishment, of a different yet similar sort.

But God wants us to eat up.

Out of pride, or out of a false belief that dining on God's provision "too often" makes it "less special," we deny ourselves the nourishment we require, the nourishment God provides, even to a second helping.

But God wants us to eat up.

*O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.*

"Wake up," the angel says. "Eat up," the angel says.

Within arm's reach, a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water.

The gifts of God, for the people of God.



My dear people of God, do not despair of your calling to God's holy work. Do not neglect the rest you require, nor the food you surely need, both for your bodies and for your souls.

Feel the touch of the angel on your shoulder, and hear the angel's command in your ear:

"Wake up."

"Eat up."

See the food God provides you.

Within arm's reach, a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water.

The gifts of God, for the people of God.

Let's eat up.