

Sermon by Jessica Stevenson
Sunday August 1, 2021
Nourishing the Body to Nourish the Soul

How many of you have ever been Hangry? You know the feeling I'm talking about, the one where you are so hungry, when you're a bit beyond yourself, and the slightest inconvenience makes you explode. You don't mean it, and as soon as you eat something you feel way better. Once my mom, grandmother and I were on a trip to Virginia. We left late in the afternoon after picking my mom up from work and were facing an 8-hour drive before we got to the hotel. After getting across the border and starting our drive we were all starting to get a little hungry as dinner time came and went with no stop on the road trip as we were trying to reach our destination as soon as we could. Suddenly, my grandmother from the back of the car pipes up that we had to be sitting down in a restaurant by 8pm eating or she was going to make us turn the car around and go home. As I frantically start googling what restaurants are along our route, my mom not-so-helpfully points out that there is a McDonald's in the next town (but that, along with every other fast food type option ... not that there are many along the 219) are shot down, since my grandmother declares that dinner requires REAL plates and cutlery. We were really thinking that she was going to make us turn around, she was super upset about it all. There may and may not have been some prayer, and a minor miracle. We saw a sign for a Perkins on the highway. They have real plates and cutlery. We were saved! At 7:59 we walked into the restaurant, everyone had a lovely meal, and the car did not have to turn around and drive home. Now many years later, we love to joke around about this story and remember the trip fondly, but boy was there some hangry going on in the backseat.

For Elijah he was so hangry, tired and frustrated he just totally gave up. He asked the lord to take his life. He felt like there was nothing more he could do, that he was no better than his ancestors, there was no way he could be better or make things better. His only hope was the Lord showing him mercy and putting him out of his misery.

What has led him to this point of desperation? Like at so many times throughout history, the ancient Israelites were struggling with their faith, struggling to stay true to God.

Israel was being ruled by King Ahad, who according to 1 Kings 16:33 was not a good king at all, he did "more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel before him". He also very successfully divided the people, with some still following the Lord and others turning to new and different Gods.

This isn't all that different from today, where some people follow God, some try to follow God, and do a fairly good job, some get distracted and still others just turn away from God all together. It is easier than we think to fall to temptations, such as money and success.

In the verses that come right before the ones we read this morning, Elijah calls down fire from heaven to demonstrate God's power over Baal, one of the false gods that was being

worshipped. After demonstrating the power of God, Elijah commanded that those who were prophets of Baal be killed. Once this was done, he called for rain and the drought was ended. Now this all sounds pretty amazing so far, right? Proving the power of God and providing some desperately needed water. This was a good day, right?

So, just how did things turn so quickly, how did he get to such a point of despair where he wanted to die? Well, the King Ahab and the Queen Jezebel, supported the prophets of Baal and were determined to kill Elijah after what he had done. Elijah was tired. He was burned out. He had given all that he had. He had answered God's call, done everything he could. He was exhausted. Even prophets need a break sometimes.

Elijah was a prayer warrior. He prayed for the drought in the first place, to help bring Israel back to God, he prayed for the fire, and he prayed for the drought to end. And his prayers had been answered. But in this, when he asked God to take his life, God said no, so what did he do?

Well, he did what I am pretty good at. He fell asleep and had a nap. Naps are like chocolate; they fix everything right? Upon waking he was greeted by food and was told to eat, and it helped him feel better. He was told a second time and provided a second meal that he needed to eat. Unsurprisingly, he was strengthened and travelled for 40 more days and nights. Now at this point you might be thinking. 40 days and 40 nights. Where have I heard that before? The bible is filled with this number: 159 times throughout the Old and New testaments to be exact. Now I won't name all of them, but we often think of the rain from the story of Noah and the Ark or when Jesus is tested in the Wilderness for example. The journey that Elijah had to take, from Beersheba to Horeb (also known as Mount Sinai) did not need to take 40 days. It would have taken him about a quarter of that time. But this longer journey allowed for a longer recovery. As it was needed in order to for Elijah to complete this journey. Simply put, his physical needs had to be met.

Here we are treated to a glimpse of humanity in the bible. While we read about saints and prophets and leaders, we should also remember that they were regular, ordinary humans just like us. They got tired, they got hangry, they struggled sometimes.

It may seem that God is only interested in our spiritual side, we need to remember that sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is focus on our physical body. Now last week we spoke about calls from God. Following your calling can be hard work, just ask anyone who had followed a call to ordained ministry. There are times of feeling too tired and too exhausted to go on. It is OK to feel like that, but we need to see it as a bit of a wake-up call to take care of ourselves. Sometimes we need a nap and a snack before we can take the next step in our journey.

There are two take-aways for us from this part of Elijah's story. The first is to be good to ourselves. Sometimes we need to stop and breathe and eat and watch Netflix. We need to care for our physical bodies and our minds. Taking time for ourselves is never a bad thing.

Secondly, this can be a place of action for us. There are people with the gift of service and hospitality, and this is a wonderful way to use these gifts. I have been very lucky in my life to never have to wonder where my next meal would come from. I've never had to worry about having a warm and dry bed to sleep in. God provides Elijah with food, bread baked over hot coals and some water. God provides for his journey. How can we help others along their journey?

We can be practical; we can support food banks and food programs. We can encourage supportive housing programs. We can advocate for government policies and programs that support those struggling with basic needs. As Covid restrictions lift, we can volunteer to cook meals, deliver sandwiches to those without permanent housing. We can support Canadian Food Grains and food programs around the world. Big or small, there are options for all.

Let us love and encourage the whole people of God, body and soul. 'Cause, sometimes, everyone needs a snack.