

SERMON: Get Up and Eat
TEXT: 1 Kings 19:1-15a

6-19-22

I don't like oatmeal. Over the years I've tried. I really have. I have added everything imaginable from brown sugar to fresh fruit, and nothing helps disguise the fact that it's oatmeal.

However, there was a time back in 2010, when my daughter and I spent a week at Heifer Ranch outside of Little Rock, Arkansas. A program of Heifer International - which this church supports through the offerings of those celebrating birthdays and anniversaries - this is a working ranch, as well as a place of education. Shelby and I joined a middle school youth group from a church in Louisiana. Each day included time for helping with actual work, like grooming the horses or fixing a broken fence, as well as time for educational activities, like making goat cheese or making a solar oven. And one day we were to spend the night in the global village, living in shacks modeled after the living spaces in some of the poorest parts of the world.

Now, keep in mind that we were in Arkansas in the month of August. The temperatures we've been having this week in Cape Girardeau are reminiscent of what we suffered under for about 15 hours - with no breaks and nothing cold to eat or drink. Our evening meal in our little village of "Urban Zimbabwe" was white rice. No butter, but we were fortunate to have a little salt. Our beverage was warm water. We got very little - if any - sleep on the dirt floor in our shack made from scraps of wood, cardboard, and corrugated metal.

When morning mercifully arrived, our breakfast was oatmeal, cooked over a fire, with none of the trimmings. And I ate a whole bowl of it. I still didn't enjoy it. And it didn't make me feel better (as I was already suffering heat exhaustion), but I knew I needed it.

In today's scripture from the Old Testament book of First Kings, an angel of the Lord visited the prophet Elijah and said to him, "GET UP AND EAT."

The passage begins with Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, threatening Elijah's life. But we need some background. You see, Jezebel was devoted to Baal, one of many Canaanite gods, and she was angry that Elijah had been winning people for Yahweh, the God of Israel. Not only that, but Elijah had killed all the prophets of Baal. Now that his life was in danger, he fled into the wilderness in fear.

Although he was afraid of being murdered, Elijah prayed for God to take his life. Then he fell asleep, and an angel touched him and said, "GET UP AND EAT." Opening his eyes, he saw a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. He ate and drank, but instead of getting up, he laid down again. And again an angel came, saying, "GET UP AND EAT, otherwise the journey will be too much for you."

Indeed, it was a long journey. Forty days and forty nights Elijah traveled to Horeb, the mount of God. But he was still

wrapped up in a little pity party for himself. Not that I blame him, mind you. I've enjoyed plenty of pity parties for myself at times.

The Lord asks, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And I can almost hear the whine in his voice. (Again, because I know what my own whining sounds like.) Elijah launches into the ways that he has been faithful, and "very zealous for the Lord," but has seen no results and no reward for his work. "The Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

Elijah is then instructed to "go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." A strong wind came up, splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces, but "the Lord was not in the wind." Then came an earthquake, "but the Lord was not in the earthquake." Then a fire, "but the Lord was not in the fire." After the fire, a sound of sheer silence....

Silence tends to be uncomfortable for many of us.

Sometimes I think it's because our own thoughts lead us into places where we'd rather not go. Hurtful memories, questions about why things happen, fears of what the future will bring. Our own inner monologue can often drag us down. So we drown it out with noise.

Our former music director and office manager, Jonathan, posted a video on Facebook just the other day, in which he shares what I described as a carefully studied, deep, intellectual, and emotional "testimony" of sorts on his search for truth. Specifically, the truth of Jesus' resurrection and his amazing love for the world. Toward the end of his sharing, he preaches a bit, but in such a way that I asked his permission to re-preach it to you.

Jonathan urged his friends and listeners to "turn off your televisions." He chuckled, and clarified that it was not out of some conspiracy theory or anything like that. He named some shows he

used to watch that he loved. They meant something to him. Even driving home from work, he would have his phone playing something on YouTube to silence his thoughts. He admitted to having such anxiety - along with a low level of depression - that he thought he needed something external to silence it and to allow him to function. The external noises silenced his inner monologue. But more than that, they silenced his ability to hear God speak. "Consequently," he said, "all I heard was the world speak. And there are a lot of lies in the world." Jonathan has been intentionally experiencing silence of late, and he says, "it has given me a lot more clarity than I've ever had before."

God is present in the silence. God speaks in the silence. God heals and restores in the silence. In the silence God nurtures us. In much the same way that God nurtured a fearful and despairing Elijah by sending food and water and an angel encouraging him to GET UP AND EAT.

The lesson here is that God shows up to nurture and strengthen us, to give us what we need to persevere on the journey. We live in a time where many feel like we are not thriving, but only surviving. Afraid of what we might hear when we turn on the news in the morning. Another mass shooting. Another act of war. Another angry riot. Another plan by the powerful to oppress the powerless. We all have days when life can feel like a losing battle. It makes us want to escape to the wilderness or pray for God to take us home.

This can be especially true when we are striving to be faithful servants of God, as Elijah was. And when our efforts seem all for nought, we may feel as though God has abandoned us. But God does send us angels, who come with casseroles and cakes and encourage us to GET UP AND EAT. And when we feel as though we are drowning in despair, God meets us in the silence.

When the noise of the world and the fear of the future threaten to overwhelm us, may we have the courage to enter the

silence and listen for God. In a world full of hate, may we feel and share the loving embrace of the Creator and Savior of the world. And may we surround one another, doing the work of angels, nurturing, strengthening, and lifting each other up to continue in faithful service... to the glory of God!

AMEN.