

Sermon – John 6:35, 41-51; 1 Kings 19:4-8  
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“Rest for the Weary, Bread for the Journey”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Things aren't always as bad as they seem. Yesterday, driving home from Wisconsin, I had just crossed the state line when my little Volkswagen Jetta began to make a terrible amount of noise. It sounded, suddenly, either like a race car or like a possum had crawled under the hood. Even I could tell something was wrong. I pulled off at the first exit I could find and, with some trepidation, popped the hood. I was certain that smoke would come billowing out, or that entire bits of machinery would fall out. Instead, nothing. So, I checked the dipstick and found that it was bone dry. I must look particularly helpless when standing next to a car with the hood up, because at this point a nice gentleman wandered over and talked me through what to do next. When he asked if I knew where to put the oil in, I nodded. Fortunately, he could tell I was perhaps not telling the truth, and he showed me anyway. I mean, I could've figured it out, right? So, three and a half quarts of Valvoline later, all was more or less right with the world. I arrived safely home in a much quieter car, a big problem not so big after all. I hope. Maybe? I'd better take it into the shop this week.
2. We find the prophet Elijah on the run today; he no doubt would have been more than happy to have my VW, in need of oil or not. Things seemed bad for him. In the wake of his victory over the pagan prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, Queen Jezebel has sworn to hunt him down and kill him. After a day

on the run, he is willing to give up, and he lies down to die. But what seems so bad to Elijah is nothing that God can't handle. It turns out that Elijah just needed some rest and food, which is why this story from 2,900 years ago is so relatable; most of my problems get smaller after a nap and a sandwich. Ministered to by an angel and nourished by the Lord, Elijah carries on, fortified for the hard journey ahead. What seemed impossible for him was not more than God could handle.

3. The same God who cared for Elijah now stands, impossibly it seems, before the crowd on the seashore. God had fed the one person, Elijah, but that was a mere foretaste of what the I Am would do in Galilee. Having fed the five thousand with miraculous but quite ordinary bread and fish, Jesus now proclaims that he is the Bread of Life; that whoever eats of Jesus will never be hungry again. Which begs some obvious questions. Isn't this guy Joseph's son? What does he mean he came down from heaven? And, to ask the most obvious question, what does he mean when he says we should eat him? We, who live on the other side of Christ's resurrection, know that Jesus is speaking of feeding the world through his death, inviting us to feast upon his risen life in the sacrament. But if we have managed to make sense of what Jesus means (and I'm not sure we truly have, but that's the beauty of the mystery of faith), perhaps we are left with other questions today: What does Jesus mean by believe? Is he the only bread that gives life, the only way to the Father? In our pluralistic, multicultural world of many religions and no religion at all, dare we say that Jesus is the only way? Does that sort of faith relate to the life we live in the world?
4. In my little corner of the internet, where all the Lutheran pastors hang out together, this question was being asked this week because a Lutheran was in the news. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz had been named to the Democratic ticket, a place in politics not often occupied by Lutherans. Beyond some well-founded excitement that midwestern hot dishes were going to some well-

deserved attention, the question came up as to whether his faith was relevant. Does a person's faith relate to how they would govern? Given the long history of Christian leaders abusing power, should faith relate to how they govern? Or should faith be private, purely individualized? Before he was named to the ticket, Walz liked to point out that it was less important to have the Commandments in classrooms than it was to have free lunches in those classrooms. And whether you agree or disagree with his policies, and however you plan to vote in November, this strikes me as a particularly Lutheran way to think about faith and life in the public square, prioritizing care for the neighbor.

5. We do not witness to Jesus by asserting our faith or insisting that others agree with us; we witness to our faith from below, as it were; by caring for others out of the abundance we ourselves have received from God. Some of my favorite quotes of Martin Luther are things he probably didn't say, including this one: "The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little cross on the shoes, but by making good shoes." And while Luther may not have uttered these precise words, they are reflective of his understanding of our Christian, baptismal vocation: Everything we are, and everything we do, is fueled and informed by our faith in Jesus Christ *and* that everything we are, and everything we do, is meant to serve, not dominate, others.
6. Jesus stands before us again today, offering himself as the Bread of Life, giving himself away as the life for the world. Where once Elijah laid down to rest in God, now Jesus lays down his life that we may find our rest. Jesus is the only food for this world, the only way home to God, but this is always good news, for Jesus is the only one who says we need not achieve but only believe. Whatever God is doing for the sake of the world, God is doing through Jesus Christ, who is *the* Bread of Life, not one bread among many on the buffet. But remember that God's dreams are always bigger than our narrow views, that God is reconciling all things in heaven and on earth

through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus stands before us today, giving himself away. Jesus, who is all we need, invites us to do the same, invites us to invite others to this feast of freedom and life. Even in this world of sin and death, things are not as bad as they seem, for Christ who was dead has been raised. Take and eat, for this Jesus is the life of the world, and he gives himself to you.

7. As we eat our daily bread, we do well first to give thanks. Perhaps you are prayer singers? I'm sure many of you know the mealtime prayer, "Be Present at Our Table, Lord," sung to the tune Old Hundredth. One of my favorite little games is to start that song and see how people will sing the last line. As Pastor Pam Fickenscher points out, some people will sing about feasting in paradise with thee, well others will sing that they would "strengthened for thy service be." The beauty is that both prayers are appropriate, and both grow out of Jesus' words in John 6. Jesus proclaims that we will be raised up at the last day *and* that we have eternal life even now. We will have everything we need; therefore, we can freely give of God's abundance even now. So come, friends, and feast once more on the only bread that satisfies. Have faith, and trust God to sort out the rest. Come unto Jesus as he gives himself, his life, for you and for this whole world. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.