

*“God – the Life Bread”*

Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 19  
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Sunday, August 9, 2009  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34:1-8;  
Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

My sermon this morning will discuss our responses to fear. Most of us recall from psychology class that the human being responds two ways when faced with fear, fight or flight. But I would like to talk about a third response. That is to shutdown and build walls to seclude one's self. This is the type of fear I am referring to when I ask you... “What are you afraid of?”

These may be five words that you do not want to answer for fear seems to be some type of failure. The question will bring to mind many different responses from many different people. But the question this morning remains...“What are you afraid of?”

When I was a child I was afraid of the dark. I couldn't stand it. In order to help combat this fear, I had a variety of nightlights strategically place around the room. I also needed the hall light left on just in case I needed to get up and go to the bathroom in the middle of the night (Which, of course, I would never do!) But I also needed the bedroom door left open, so I could see the light on in the hallway. I would hate to know what our electricity bill must have been!

Along with this ritual of nightlights, I would follow a routine to fall asleep. I would lay on my right side for a few minutes, and then I would roll over to the left side for a while. Then I would lay on my stomach with my head turned to the right and if I did everything right...I would fall asleep soon after I shifted my head to the left side. BUT EVEN THE BEST LAID PLANS DO NOT GUARANTEE THE RESULT WE ALWAYS SEEK. This is when the fear would grip me! When this was the case, I would call out to my mom or step dad and beg if I could sleep on the floor in their room with my sleeping bag. Then, even in the darkness of their room I could fall asleep. Then one of them would carry me to my room and my own bed. So when I ask you the question, “What are you afraid of?” You will not only have different answers, but the answer you give, like my answer, may not be the true fear.

I believe we find a misunderstanding of fear addressed in our Bible texts this morning.

In the text from First Kings, we read that Elijah had his own encounter with fear. Elijah confronts 450 prophets that claim to have power to summon Baal. Baal was a weather god that was believed to control rain, a powerful act for a people that rely on rain for survival. Elijah defeated the 450 prophets of Baal in a miracle face-off competition. The Bible tells us that the 450 prophets die at the hands of Elijah and the people.

Elijah is then confronted by a woman named Jezebel. Now Jezebel was the daughter of the king of Sidon. She is a Baal worshipper who marries king Ahab of Israel and incites him to sin by relying on her god. So Jezebel is a person of prominence and power and she threatens Elijah, saying that he will receive the same death treatment that was given to her Baal prophets. Chapter

19 of First Kings in verse #3 we read that Elijah was afraid! I automatically assume that Elijah is afraid of death. I can read that Elijah was not afraid of death when he challenged the prophets of Baal. We can read that Elijah did not have any fear that God was not with him. But we read that Elijah **was** afraid when Jezebel, a person in power, vowed to see him die. So like a smart man he runs! Splits and takes off into the desert. Elijah then prays that God will allow him to die. But wait! I was thinking that Elijah was afraid to die! Now he is praying to God for death. Apparently death is not what Elijah is afraid of! If you were afraid of death, you would not pray to God for death. Elijah is apparently experiencing a different fear. Elijah then encounters an angel. Elijah does not need to be told the typical “Fear not, I am an angel of the Lord” at the sight of the angel. He follows the direction to journey for the hills, but not just any hill. Elijah goes to Mt. Horeb, also known as Mt. Sinai, the place where Moses receives the Ten Commandments. Prophets speak God’s word to the people when they are disobedient. Prophets remind people to obey the 10 commandments.

Elijah is taught an important lesson from God in the following verses and I learn something also. Elijah learns that God is not in the wind just because it is wind. God is not in the earthquake just because the earth is moved. God is not even in the fire simply because fire can be both life giving and a cause of death or destruction. And just when we think that God must be in the sheer silence, I am surprised to find that God may not be there either. And this is terrifying for me. Terrifying that I cannot go out and find God. I am terrified that I cannot follow the rules of the Ten Commandments well enough to find God. Adonai, Lord, God, Creator, and Father will be wherever God wants to be.

And this was precisely what I believe Elijah learned on that day, long ago, on the mountain. And we find grace here in the Old Testament. God gave Elijah what he needed even though Elijah believed he was unworthy.

And this is what brings us to our Gospel lesson today. Here is difficult teaching for us on the Bread of Life. Difficult to understand and difficult to preach. Perhaps that is why we focus on it for our Gospel for 5 weeks! And some people say that God does not have a sense of humor!

In the book of John it is the Jews that stand in opposition to Jesus. The Jews fear Jesus and his teaching for different reasons. The reason why I began this sermon talking about fear and asking you “What are you afraid of?” is because I think this is the main reason for the conflict the Jews have with Jesus. And thus an issue that can foul us up. FEAR. The Jews want to please God; simply put they want to remain in covenant with God. If they are God’s people then they need to stay in the boundaries of God’s commandments. Who could blame them for not wanting to lose God! The problem is that their fear begins to undermine their trust and faith in God. My fears can also undermine the trust and faith that I have in God.

You know I get scared sometimes. I talked about being afraid of the dark. I have come to find that it was not being in the dark at all, that I was afraid of. I was afraid of being alone. All the light that I used to comfort me would not meet the true need that I had. I was hungry for comfort and I was thirsty for God’s peace and I did not even realize. I was like an infant that hungers but has no idea what is wrong. The loving parent knows however, and comes to pick up the child and bring the child food. And this is what Jesus promises, “I am the bread of life.” **God - the life**

**bread.** You can eat the things of this world in search of comfort and satisfaction but you aren't going to get what you truly hunger and thirst for. I mean what you really hunger and thirst for. "What are you afraid of?" Eternal life is right here (hold hands out like receiving communion), you get in right here in these worship spaces, and you get Christ in prayer, relationships, and serving. You will not be left orphaned.

Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves." "Believe and have eternal life." What are you afraid of?

AMEN