

If I am being completely honest with you, I have to say that this week, I have just been tired. Flat out. And in some ways it's the good kind of tired and in other ways it's that lingering tired feeling that we've been carrying around for a year and a half. I spent the last week with 14 of our youth at Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp and I don't know how we packed so much into one week, but it was incredible. We hiked mountains, we sang and danced, we rafted, we did rope courses and studied Scripture, and perhaps even more amazing in all of it, we became a community with 100 other people. It was truly a wonderful time and I loved every minute I got to spend with our incredible young people and I am exhausted.

And you know how sometimes, even the things you enjoy the most still take some time to recover from? Like any tiredness you had before gets compounded from all of the excitement and joy you've just experienced? Well, that's where I'm at today. Because the other part of this week, post-camp is a week that we, in my family, have been preparing for, for some time now. Some of our family with us today, we haven't seen in over a year. And I know you all have stories of a similar nature, but you know, that wears on you too. Maybe not like hiking up a mountain all in one day, but it wears on you little by little. And yet, here we are. My family with my family. Together. And I wonder how it's even possible we've gotten to this point. How did we get here, anyway?

In our lesson today, Elijah has pretty much reached his end. He's convinced there's nothing left in the tank. He's exhausted, he's completely wiped out. He's just done with all of it. Some of it is because he's seen and been a part of some incredible things that God has done, and some of it is just the little moments of being worn down by the challenges he faced in his time. And so he leaves Israel and journeys into the wilderness, all the way to Mount at Horeb. But he's not just leaving one place for another. Symbolically, he's leaving behind the promise of God and going back to a place of wilderness because he's done. He's giving up.

Except that God hasn't given up. If there's one thing that we consistently see throughout Scripture, Testaments Old and New, it's that God doesn't give up. Not when sin and death first infiltrated God's good creation, not when the people continuously turned away from God's love and mercy, not even when God was rejected in Christ. God doesn't give up. And God refuses to let us give up, too.

"What are you doing here, Elijah?" That's the question God asks him. What are you doing here? Of course, we know and God knows and even Elijah knows why he's in the wilderness. It's because he's giving up. He's done. And he will even try to tell God that he can't go on anymore. Except that he can. Because God hasn't given up. God feeds Elijah so that he might be strengthened for the next part of the journey. God provides

Elijah with the sustenance he needs to keep going, to keep pressing on, to continue the work that God has begun in and through him.

There's a lot of things we can talk about in John chapter 6, most of them bread related. And I love bread. I love all kinds of bread, too. But even bread can only fill you up so much. Even bread can only give you so much of the energy needed to keep going when you don't know how. Even bread is not enough sometimes. Jesus knows that. And he's trying to help the crowds and us understand it, too. We cannot simply will ourselves to the fullness of life. No amount of rugged individualism and pull yourself up by your bootstraps motivational talk will be enough. We can't just keep adding more bread, more protein powder, more caffeine, more on our schedules, more social media platforms, more motivational podcasts and self-help books. It won't work. We won't be satisfied. We won't find rest. We won't live as fulfilled people.

We will only truly find rest, we will only truly find fulfillment, we will only recognize the abundance that exists and is laid before us, when we remember that God provides, when we remember that God, our Lord, our Creator, our Source, will never leave us or forsake us. When we remember that God doesn't give up. And that Christ is living proof of this promise. That through the grace and love of Christ, we are prepared for whatever lies ahead. Because by this same grace and love, it's how we're here. We talk of history as one of human triumph and perseverance, forgetting that it is God who is so committed to the world that he sent his only Son, so that we may have life abundantly. We are here because God is faithful. We are here because God in Christ Jesus so loves the world. We are here because God has graciously provided us the strength to continue on this journey. And that grace is truly enough for each of us.

My friends in Christ, it's been a long journey this past year and a half. And I know we're all tired in our own ways, some of them for similar reason, others more unique. I know that it feels like we take two steps forward and then a few more back. I know that we just want all of this to be over. But today we are reminded that this is not the end of our journey. Fed and nourished by Jesus, the bread of life, we are renewed in faith and hope for our lives and for the life of the world. We are strengthened for the journey because in Christ, there is only life. And so we press on knowing that God has brought each of us to this place and time. We are here because God has led us to be here together. In Christ, the bread of life, we are ready for whatever comes. In Christ, we are the church. And so we come to the table that Christ has prepared for us to be strengthened once again by his love and grace. And we come together because we do not take this journey alone. God is faithful. God is with us. God provides for us. And God will not give up on us. All praise be to Christ, our hope and our peace. Amen.