

# PENTECOST 12

## Proper 14 - Year B

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*Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.*

### 1 Kings 19:4-8

<sup>4</sup>But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." <sup>5</sup>Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup>He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. <sup>7</sup>The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you." <sup>8</sup>He got up and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

#### Commentary from Jon Achée

In the Old Testament reading for Proper 14, we encounter the prophet Elijah fleeing for his life from the wrath of Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab of Israel, who has vowed to kill for his violent acts against the prophets of Jezebel's god, Baal (1 Kings 18:20-39). Elijah has left his companion and has fled into the wilderness on his own, afraid, exhausted, and overwhelmed by all that he is confronted with. How many times have we found ourselves overwhelmed and exhausted by our own concerns, the endless concerns of the world, and the utter feeling of despair that, seemingly, it does not matter what we do, we cannot stop the suffering with which we are confronted? There is just not enough we can do. We are not "enough." It is easy to sympathize with Elijah, who, amid his despair and exhaustion, simply sits down under a tree and says to the Lord, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life" (v. 4). However, we must examine what Elijah does next. He allows himself to fall asleep, and in the midst of his own "wilderness," he rests and only then does an angel appear to bring him physical nourishment. Elijah then

lays down again to rest, and again the angel of the Lord comes to him with more nourishment and encouragement to get "back on the road" and to face his own journey of "forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God" (v. 8), where the work of the Lord awaits him.

Sometimes the most difficult things to do are to step back while in a "wilderness" period of our lives, take a deep breath, and rest. To have faith that physical, spiritual, and inspirational nourishment will be provided that only can occur in a time of rest and calm. Even in the wilderness. Scripture is full of stories where God shows up in the wilderness. We need to take a breath, take a rest, and slow down, opening ourselves to the quiet voice of the Lord. In faith, God will be there to provide the nourishment we need to give us strength for our own journeys and to address the suffering of the world.

#### Discussion Questions

Can you recall a time when you found God in a wilderness experience – a time of exhaustion or despair?

What faith or spiritual practices do you utilize to regain your strength to "get back on the road" when you are tired and overwhelmed by a difficult problem in your own life or by the injustices you witness in the world?

## Psalm 34:1-8

- <sup>1</sup> I will bless the Lord at all times; \*  
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.
- <sup>2</sup> I will glory in the Lord; \*  
let the humble hear and rejoice.
- <sup>3</sup> Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord; \*  
let us exalt his Name together.
- <sup>4</sup> I sought the Lord, and he answered me \*  
and delivered me out of all my terror.
- <sup>5</sup> Look upon him and be radiant, \*  
and let not your faces be ashamed.
- <sup>6</sup> I called in my affliction and the Lord heard me \*  
and saved me from all my troubles.
- <sup>7</sup> The angel of the Lord encompasses those who fear  
him, \*  
and he will deliver them.
- <sup>8</sup> Taste and see that the Lord is good; \*  
happy are they who trust in him!

### Commentary from Jon Achée

Psalm 34 has been classified by Biblical scholars as one of fifteen “Individual Hymns of Thanksgiving.” The superscription of the psalm relates this song of thanksgiving as a response to a specific instance in the life of David, in which the Lord delivered him from potential death (scholars think it may refer to David’s escape from King Achish in 1 Sam 21:10-15). The psalmist sings, “I called in my affliction and the Lord heard me and saved me from all my troubles” (v. 6). The psalmist is thankful because God hears his cry for help and saves him. God is present in the world, watching over us, and the psalmist wants us to hear this in his song to the Lord. We are encouraged to experience God and the comfort that this relationship with God will bring into our lives. To “taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are they who trust in him!” (v. 8).

### Discussion Questions

How would your life be different if you practiced intentional gratitude in your daily life? If “[God’s] praise shall ever be in your mouth”?

What are you thankful for today?

## Ephesians 4:25-5:2

<sup>25</sup> So then, putting away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with your neighbor, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and do not make room for the devil. <sup>28</sup> Those who steal must give up stealing; rather, let them labor, doing good work with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. <sup>29</sup> Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. **5** <sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, <sup>2</sup> and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

### Commentary from Jon Achée

When reflecting on the list of moral advice and behavioral guidance from Paul contained in the verses of this reading, it is important to view it within the entire context of the letter to the Ephesian church. As Paul professes throughout Ephesians, it is through Christ and through the cross that we are bonded together in love and unity. A life of love and unity of and for all peoples, Jew and Gentile, all races, all ethnicities, all nationalities, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity. There is but one body of Christ, and we are all members of this body. This is the new life that Christ calls us into through his life, death, and resurrection.

In writing, “Let each of you speak the truth with your neighbor, for we are members of one another” (v. 25), Paul provides us with practical guidance on how we can best live our lives to ensure we are in service to each other and can create the conditions that will allow us to be bonded to one another in the love and unity of the body of Christ – how to live our lives with dignity and live into our own baptismal vows to respect the dignity of every living being.

Paul is letting us know how we can realize the grace and joy of being in total congruence with our True Selves, reflecting the image of God in which humankind was created. We were created to be in relationship with each other and God, which is realized in the carrying on of the grace-filled work of Christ through the gifts he bestowed upon us. “Therefore,” Paul writes, “be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (5:1-2).

### Discussion Questions

What is God calling you to right now? What are your gifts that will allow you to respond to that call?

How does it feel in those moments when you have been an “imitator of God,” and living into Beloved Community?

## John 6:35, 41-51

<sup>35</sup>When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late;

<sup>41</sup>Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and he divided the two fish among them all. <sup>42</sup>And all ate and were filled, <sup>43</sup>and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. <sup>44</sup>Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

<sup>45</sup>Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>46</sup>After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

<sup>47</sup>When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. <sup>48</sup>When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came toward them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. <sup>49</sup>But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, <sup>50</sup>for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” <sup>51</sup>Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded.

### Commentary from Jon Achée

The Gospel of John is known for the many “I am” statements that Jesus makes to the crowds and individuals he encounters during his ministry. Here, we are confronted with one of the most well-known and oft-repeated “I am” statements: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry” (v. 35). The cosmic Johannine Jesus is constantly trying to explain to a material and earthly-focused world who he is, and that belief in him offers more than just a life of daily sustenance. Once again, in this instance, the crowd, and particularly the Jewish religious authorities, either don’t get it, understand it in a literal sense, or just view him as the son of a local couple; what can he be talking about, they wonder, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?” (v. 42).

Jesus has come to turn things completely upside down. He will not be the Messiah who will overthrow the Roman Empire, liberate the people, and provide material wealth. These things are temporal and don’t last as Jesus points out: “Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died” (v. 49). Jesus comes from above, “the living bread that came down from heaven” (v. 51), a common theme in the Gospel of John, and Jesus provides not a temporal and temporary promise of salvation, but an eternal one. Jesus is turning upside down and inside out what the Messiah is and will be. He would not be a king who would restore an earthly kingdom, but one who would establish and provide an eternal kingdom of justice, peace, and love through service and even the ultimate sacrifice.

### Discussion Questions

What might need to be turned upside down in your congregational community to ensure they are fully realizing the Kingdom of God and eating the bread of life in today’s complex world?

What do Jesus’ words, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” mean for you?