

**August 8, 2021 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**1 Kings 19: 4-8, Psalm 34:1-8**  
**Ephesians 4:25—5:2, John 6:35, 41-51**  
**(shortened to 6:35, 49-51)**

**Grace and peace, bread enough, living bread, to you, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.**

**When I was 4, 5, 6 years old**, I'd roar up and down the sidewalks of our block peddling my big wheel.  
Molded mostly of red plastic, it had yellow handle bars, and a blue adjustable seat.

Behind that blue seat was my favorite amenity of all:

a rear storage compartment, replete with a lid (until it broke off from too much use).

That compartment, it was the perfect cross between a trunk and a glove box.

In it I stashed... everything:

treasures I'd find in my adventures, like rocks and smelly green walnuts from our neighbors tree,

dolls and action figures,

art supplies,

and, always, snacks... dry cereal, some vanilla wafers, whatever we had around the kitchen.

Bread for the journey.

**When I was a teenager**, I'd zip up around town on my red Raleigh ten speed,

grateful always for the bike bag hanging just behind the seat.

In it I'd keep a granola bar and, in season, a sleeve of thin mint Girl Scout cookies.

More bread for the journey.

**As an adult, our family** has as an assortment of food that we call trail lunch.

It's a modification of what we actually eat on trail, on canoe trips,

Well-suited for road trips or day hikes.

This so-called "trail lunch" includes:

crackers and cheese,

sliced cucumber and red pepper and apples,

hard salami, humus, dates, and other treats.

Still more bread for the journey.

**This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of 5 Sundays** when we hear the debrief that follows Jesus' feeding the 5000 on that hillside.

I am the Bread of Life, Jesus tells them, whoever eats of this bread will live forever.

That's not the only bread we hear about this morning.

The Psalmist sings, "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord."

In 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, the prophet Elijah is on the run,  
running for his life,  
desperate and terrified,  
ready to give up, exhausted,  
and the angel of the Lord shakes him awake:  
"Get up and eat," the angel prods.

At his head, Elijah finds a cake of bread baked on the hot stones; near it is a jar of water.  
He eats and drinks and then rests again, only to be shaken once more:  
"Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you."

**Get up and eat, food for the journey,** dear friends,  
bread for the journey, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.  
Three reflections on this bread for the journey: Persistence, Nourishment, and Angels.

**First, persistence.**

I so appreciate how that angel comes not once but twice to nudge Elijah awake,  
to make sure he's got what he needs.  
This week, along with some of you, I attended the funeral of Pastor David Preus.  
He lived 99 years, and served here at Hope from 1957 to 1973,  
when he was elected President, like Bishop, of the American Lutheran Church.  
It was a simple and beautiful service with lots of stories from his family,  
stories about his way of seeking common ground and solving problems,  
stories about his steady, clearheaded persistence, his joy, his gratitude,  
his love and care for the land.

Bishop Preus's hand in shaping the role of the church in the world during those years cannot be overstated.  
From *this* pulpit at Hope to the Minneapolis School Board,  
from civil rights protests with Dr. King in the US  
to commitments to change in Eastern Europe and South Africa,  
David Preus held onto the heart of the gospel, and he lived it.  
I wasn't surprised to see some of you present at the funeral.  
I was touched to walk out afterward and find a group of women  
(with last names like Hanson, and Speidel and Langguth)  
who grew up at Hope and remember well Pastor Preus and his family.

Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you, the angel said to Elijah.

Pastor Preus knew this, he lived it.

He knew his source, his grace, his strength,

and he trusted **God's persistent**, tender-hearted love and forgiveness

that carried him through a lifetime and now holds him in eternal rest.

## **Secondly, nourishment.**

Today as we pray Godspeed for our beloved Minister of Worship and Music, Zach,

I'm particularly aware of how much you've nourished this congregation, Zach.

I arrived here 6 years ago this Sunday.

The music and worship search committee was poised to begin interviews.

You were called and arrived in September.

Over these years you've grown and changed, and so have we.

Stretching beyond our walls, you've grounded this congregation in Love and

encouraged us to be more truly who God created us to be.

Particularly during the unrelenting intensity of the pandemic, and our virtual life,

your gifts for not only musical beauty, but also visual beauty shown,

grounding us, encouraging us, calling us to a full-bodied journey with God.

Zach is headed for Bethel Lutheran Church, the big downtown congregation in Madison.

Lisa Morse commented this week,

"You're going to do wonderous things [there], as you've done for us."

It's true.

In these exhausting days of goodbyes and hellos, of thank yous, and never-ending details,

may you, Zach, breathe deeply,

may you be nourished, fed, by the One who loves you and cares for you, nourishes you,

more than you can ever know.

## **Finally, Angels.**

When I was being called to Hope, I wasn't simply joining this faithful community, but

I was leaving a congregation that I had loved deeply,

for a dozen years,

through tremendous change.

It was in that time I came to trust the Holy Spirit in new ways.

Yes, the Holy Spirit was calling me to Hope,

inviting me into these new challenges and new opportunities,  
But that same Holy Spirit that was leading me,  
was also caring for that beloved community that I was leaving.  
That may sound obvious, but it took me a while and a fair amount of guilt to realize it.  
I've been thinking about it with Zach this week:  
Zach's being called to Bethel and called to be closer to his family.  
In our grief,  
in an already uncertain time,  
it would be easy for us to accidently assume we're in this by ourselves, on our own.  
Friends, that's not how it works.  
Sometimes it feels that way, but it's not how it works.  
The same Holy Spirit that is at work in Zach, is at work with this faithful community:  
Comforting us in change,  
preparing us for what is to come,  
opening pathways for ministry and new companions for the journey.  
We're not alone.  
I love that gentle angel that comes to Elijah under the broom tree.  
He's had it, he's done,  
and this straight-talking angel doesn't minimize the situation, but says: Eat.  
Get up and eat.  
You're going to need this.  
The journey, it's going to be long. Get up and eat.

**You know, my stash of food in that long-gone big wheel compartment,**

or my bike bag, our best trail lunch provisions,  
they matter and they have been bread for the journey.  
But the bread of life from Jesus, the living bread,  
the bread that the angel provides,  
I pray that for you even more:  
Moments at the communion table that will keep you, sustain you, for the days to come.  
Surprising grace showered upon you,  
uplifting and buoying,  
inspiring justice,  
reminding you of the Spirit's power, the Maker's mercy.

The practice of life in faithful community, Life Together,  
that isn't always easy, but is rich, and real, and honest,  
a physical reminder of the Spirit's incarnation.

That's my prayer, for you, Zach,  
but for you all, each of you, as we venture on today, this week.

**May the angels find you, feed you, keep you.**

May Jesus, our Bread for the journey, fill your hunger and sustain you for all that this week will bring.

And may we be bread, living bread, for each other, for our neighbors, for the world. Amen.