

There are many subjects in the bible that make people uncomfortable. We encounter subjects that call out our behavior and tell us to do things we don't want to do. There are examples of living that just don't mix well with the ethos of living we have in our contemporary world. And today we hit on one that is a big issue for many people. Rest.

Most of us don't do this well. Some of us spend our lives like two year olds, petulantly fighting rest until we find ourselves hanging asleep on the baby gate of life.

Rest is so important we hear multiple times about how Jesus went away on his own. How he slept as the boat went across the Sea of Tiberias. Yet I often find this simple act as one of the hardest ways to emulate a holy life.

Perhaps though, I discovered some truth in our reading about Elijah that gives me insight about rest.

We come in to the reading today mid-story. Elijah is running in to the wilderness because he has just slaughtered all the priests of Baal and Jezebel is seeking to have him slaughtered as well. Now, I seriously doubt that God will call any one of us to a similar task but we do have busy days filled with tough work, so let's think of it that way.

The thing I noticed was that Elijah doesn't just sleep, but is provided food and water. This makes sense, the three things are typical of regaining sustenance and energy. But why twice? Why is there sleep, food, and water followed by the same. After all, Jezebel's people are after him, in our modern thought, he ought to keep on moving. But no, there's time for more rest and more sustenance.

Perhaps we need to think about the meals differently. The first bread and water are there to fill his stomach, to give him energy and fill his physical needs. But perhaps the second round of food is the one we need to look at and the one we tend to ignore in our rest.

After Elijah's worldly needs are met, giving him the energy to physically go, perhaps we need to see the second water and bread as that from heaven. Because the sustenance we get from our spiritual well being is just as important and more often ignored.

The water of heaven. The water of our baptism cleanses our souls of the deeds of the past. The living water of baptism wipes away the past and gives us hope for the future. Jesus tells the woman at the well that he is the living water. That's important because the entrance right for Judaism involves passing through moving, living water. Water that is flowing and full of air, not water that is stagnate, not moving, and unhealthy.

Taking time in our rest to seek forgiveness for the past and allow the water of our baptism to overflow us gives us emotional strength to go forward. How many times have we taken the relief of forgiveness to give us strength to keep going. It lifts a weight from our shoulders and our souls.

One baptism, no matter when it occurs in our life, is enough to wipe away the past at that moment and all the pasts that are to come. We need to hold that truth close and remember it. Whether you remember your baptism or not, it is something we need to embrace more fully because the gift of the mark of God upon us that it gives is filled with reassurance. Taking time to embrace that effect of the water of heaven in baptism can give us an emotional refilling during our rest that can make a difference.

Likewise with the bread of heaven. Baptism cleanses our past, communion brings us together. It shows us we are not alone. Communion reminds us that we are part of the body of Christ on earth and in heaven. When we are tired, feel alone, or just feel we can't go on, knowing there are others that share our load can give us strength. Because it means that we can rest as there are others to do the work while we do so.

All too often when we are tired we get the feeling we are working alone, that no one cares or is willing to help. But we are never alone. We may be the working part of the body at the moment, but others are doing other work. Others are there to love and serve when we are taking a pause.

Elijah got sleep, the sustenance of earth, and the sustenance of heaven. That second part is the part we have to remember is equally important. We get the whole earth part, but the sustenance of heaven reminds us we are forgiven children of God, part of a community, and loved. When we are reminded of those things it makes the rest so much more valuable. We can keep going because we know God has forgiven us of our past and fed us for our future.

Let us all take that kind of rest. Rest to renew our physical self and rest to embrace the gifts of our spiritual self. The bread of earth and heaven and the water of earth and heaven make us complete, giving us the energy to keep going in this world and the next.

Amen.