

1 Kings 19:4-8

John 6:35,41-51

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

“Look upon the Lord and be radiant;  
proclaim with me the greatness of God.”

AMEN!

Live life long enough and  
you’ll experience transitions.

They are inevitable.

Most, if not all, recall the feeling of  
getting their driver’s license.

A first love or your wedding day are good examples.

Graduation, confirmation,  
a career change or promotion  
all account for life transitions.

They are memorable and  
sometimes quite scary times.

For a moment, this morning,  
let me ask you to remember that time in  
your life when you transitioned  
from elementary school to junior high.

The 6th to 7th grade leap.

Today it is the transition from  
elementary school to middle school:  
a 5th to 6th grade leap.

Do you remember that feeling in your stomach?

Suddenly you went from  
being the queen or king of the hill  
in elementary school to a lowly serf in  
the junior high/middle school realm.

Once the oldest of the student body  
to now the youngest;

from one multi-purpose teacher that taught  
all subjects in one room to  
6 different teachers in 6 different rooms  
that specialize in one subject.

I remember that feeling of anxiety trying  
to get from one class to the next in  
four minute slot

while needing to stop off at the locker  
for books or homework.

I can still feel the stress of working  
my locker combination, pulling the lock,

and not getting it open.

To this day, I can walk into a school locker room  
and the sound and smell carries me back  
to that transition in life. (Pause)

Lawrence Craig wrote that in all  
the anxieties of Junior high and Middle school  
we cannot forget the quintessential one: gym class.

Dress out rooms and showers  
and everything that goes with that!

These are times when we are  
becoming aware of our personal image,  
labels, belonging and cliques.

The bullies and the heroes come and go  
like an afternoon Florida storm.

In my school there were the skin-heads.

They listened to music unfamiliar to most and  
dressed in attention getting ways.

There were of course the jocks and the nerds.

Muscle heads and book smart kids

seem to be always around.

And there were those who didn't really fit  
into any group or label.

These often got the brunt of everyone's bias  
since their label was "no label."

Being a part of something, a part of a crowd was  
so important in those years of immaturity.

Of course, we thought it was so important  
but now I look back and consider  
my behavior pretty ridiculous.

Why did we put so much stock into labels?

Do you remember what it felt like  
to be slapped with a label?

Pigeon-holed in a social pyramid where people  
fought to get to the top no matter  
who was stepped on or hurt.

Real people with real feelings, given real pain.

People who had parents that loved them  
were often sacrificed as labels  
were doled out in junior high. (Pause)

What is tragic is that much of that  
middle school mentality about labeling is  
still present later in life.

We see it in corporations and societal structures, too.

Labels that limit people, even people who  
reach the upper parts of the pyramid will soon  
find out that there are limits there, too.

A label never totally defines or reflects your potential.  
(Pause)

Starting at 1 Kings, we find a  
portion of one of my favorite  
Biblical accounts.

Elijah is about to spiral out of control.

I want to take a moment to set the context  
for the portion we read today.

Elijah had just conquered the prophets of Baal.

At the time, there were two popular gods.

The One true God, the God of the Israelites  
and the god Baal, the god of the Canaanites.

Baal was believed to aid in fertility.

Fertility of crops for food and for people.

Baal was gaining popularity even among  
the Israelites and they boasted  
450 prophets.

The One True God had only Elijah.

Junior high and middle school logic reminds us  
who had the most popularity.

Who in their right mind would follow Elijah, the loner?

That is a hard label to shake.

Well, in 1 Kings we are told that Elijah offered up  
a challenge to the 450 prophets of Baal.

Which God will be called upon and  
supernaturally light a fire in their presence?

The prophets of Baal slaughtered a bull  
and so did Elijah.

The 450 prophets danced around their bull,  
cried and shouted aloud,  
they even cut themselves with sword

and spear to get the attention of Baal.

They raved and raved but no fire was lit.

They sought Baal for a response and found silence.

When Elijah slaughtered the bull  
he called the people watching  
to come near.

He dumped water on the altar and on  
the sectioned parts of the bull.

He invited the people to bring water and  
dump it on the altar and bull three times.

Everything was soaking wet!

Then the loner prophet of the Lord God said,  
“O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,

let it be known this day that you are God of Israel,  
that I am your servant, and that I have  
done all these things at your bidding.

Answer me, O Lord, so that this people  
will know you are God and that you have  
turned their hearts back.”

In that moment, the Bible tells us that  
fire consumed everything...

the altar, the wood, the bull, the stones, and  
even the water... all caught fire!

For everyone present, it was a supernatural event  
and the ultimate sign that God continues  
to call people home even when  
they wander away. (Pause)

Now, I love this story not because there is  
any proof about the existence of God in it.

I love it because of what this story  
tells us about human beings.

We think that an event like this would propel  
Elijah's status and crush his loner label!

That's what happens in junior high and in  
middle school, right?

The underdog experiences a victory and  
they become the most popular kid in school. :-)

And they live happily ever after.

That may happen in the movies, but not in real life.



Just like in real life, we find the truth  
told in the Bible that real life people who  
hold power and control will do whatever  
it takes in order to keep it.

And that even people, like Elijah,  
who deliver God's messages are  
not innocent heroes.

When Elijah won the challenge, I talked about,  
he seized all of the prophets of Baal at  
the river between Mt. Carmel and  
the Galilean hills and executed them.

He let none of them live. (Pause)

Surrounding this message of God answering  
the people's plea for proof, there is tragedy  
and punishment and humans demand  
that executions are to be doled out.

In real life, no one is innocent.

Jezebel, when she gets word of what  
happened vows to hunt down Elijah and  
kill him for killing the 450 prophets.

We look and look for the human hero and heroine but  
I am afraid that we do not have

one today to pin that label upon. (Pause)

Elijah fled into the wilderness to hide and  
prayed for his own death to come from  
the hand of God. (Pause)

Labels, beloved, never totally define us.

When we are afraid or feel we do not measure up,  
then it is likely that we are trying to live up  
to some label we think will finally define us.

A place on the social pyramid that has  
nothing to do with our real potential.

This was where Elijah landed.

Then, an angel appeared to Elijah,  
and then appeared again.

If there is gospel here it is that  
God did not give up on Elijah.

“Get up and eat, otherwise the journey  
will be too much for you.”

Sometimes it is as simple as that for us.

“Get up and eat.”

Life, in all of its transitions and  
labels and falls, is a journey.

Even those who fall from grace have to eat  
because the journey is not complete. (Pause)

Where are you stuck?

What cave do you want to hide in?

Hear the word of God, “Get up and eat,  
otherwise the journey is too hard for you.”

You’ll find, I hope, that these texts this morning  
are not simply commands for us to keep up  
with the bodies need for calories.

We require a spiritual food, too.

That is what Jesus spoke about  
to the complaining crowd.

In three different places within our gospel lesson  
Jesus made the claim: I am the bread of life,  
I am the bread from heaven, and then  
I am the living bread.

We consume the Word (the Bread)

and find the Spirit consumes us from  
the inside out.

Sure, there is Jesus' identity  
embedded in His claim.

We are also given his origin, but what is  
the most important take-away is  
this new relationship God extends  
to all people.

“Whoever comes to Him will never be hungry,  
and whoever believes in Him will never be thirsty.”

We no longer need to pretend to fit a label.

We no longer need to hide ourselves in a cave  
for the less than honorable things we've done.

We no longer need to be anxious about  
the transitions we encounter in life,  
they'll come and they will pass.

For today, it is enough that you are  
reminded of the light inside you.

Your strength and resilience to keep  
the love of God flowing out of you is real.

No matter what mountain  
you're about to climb, or are climbing,  
or are climbing down.

You are never alone.

AMEN!