

SERMON

HOW TO SURVIVE SELF-PITY

Preaching texts: 1 Kings 19:4-8; John 6:35,41-51

This morning I am feeling sorry for myself. I had oral surgery on Thursday and had 8 implants put in my mouth. I thought I would be ok to preach by now, but three days really isn't long enough for the swelling to go down. I've done this before. Once I had wrist surgery. The next Sunday, instead of taking the day off, I was behind the altar with my arm above my head. You would think I would learn my lesson. But today I'm feeling sorry for myself.

Now, my worries pale in comparison to others. I think of those who are feeling sorry for themselves because a California wildfire just took their home. Or those who are dying of Covid because they didn't get vaccinated, those lost so much in the floods last week. They are asking questions like, "Why me? It's not fair! What now?"

I would imagine all of us have said words like that at some time in our lives. Self-pity has been around for a long time. We see it in our 1st lesson for today ... in the life of that great prophet Elijah. To understand our 1st lesson, we need to have a little background.

This took place in 9th century B.C. A new king of Israel had been enthroned. His name was Ahab. He married a worshipper of Baal ... a woman named Jezebel. Idol worship was really growing. This all led up to a showdown on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the priests of Baal. The contest was to see whose god was more powerful.

The 450 priests of Baal went first. They had put a sacrificial animal on top of an altar of stones. Then they called on Baal to ignite the offering ... but nothing happened. For hours they went at it with no results. Elijah started poking fun at the saying, "Pray louder ... maybe your god is meditating ... or wandered away ... or maybe he fell asleep!" The priests of Baal even cut themselves with their knives to show Baal how serious they were ... but still nothing happened. Finally, the 450 priests stopped due to exhaustion.

Then Elijah prepared his altar. When the rocks and the wood and the animal were all in place ... Elijah dug a trench around it and ordered it filled with water. Then Elijah commanded the people to drench everything with water. He told them to do it again. Then, a third time he told them to soak everything.

Then Elijah prayed to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ... and God sent fire ... and the fire consumed the wood, the animals, the rocks ... the fire scorched the earth and dried up the trench. God won! Elijah, who had led the fight for the Lord, won the battle!

But it was at this point that self-pity got its foot in the door. Elijah won the battle ... but he was exhausted. When he heard that King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were out to get him ... that was the last straw. Elijah had had it ... and he was ready to pack it in. Elijah was having a pity party.

Elijah's experience is really a universal one. What can we do when we find ourselves feeling sorry for ourselves? First of all, if you find yourself in a pity party, is it possible you are running yourself too hard and too fast? Maybe it's your fault. Why does it take an ulcer or a heart attack or an emotional breakdown or a divorce before we reevaluate our priorities? Exhaustion can lead to self-pity.

Another lesson we can take from this is that self-pity has a way of changing your focus. Elijah cried out, "Take MY life. I am no better than MY fathers!" It's all about him. He is focused too much on himself. We can get so caught up in what is going on in our lives we forget how God provides. Notice what happened to Elijah. While he slept an angel came and woke him up and said, "Get up and eat and drink ... so you can have strength for your journey."

And that is what happens each week here at Good Shepherd. God provides for us in Holy Communion. We eat ... we drink ... and we have strength for the journey. And what's the journey? It's to be God's people in the world today. I want to thank you for being God's people in the world today. Tonight, we are offering VBS so children of all ages can come and learn about God's love for them. Your support of our church makes things like this possible.

It's been said, "The world doesn't care what the church knows, until the world knows how much the church cares."

Thank you for being a part of this church that cares. May God bless you as you help people with those questions, “Why me? It’s not fair! What now?”

AMEN.