

Rev. Benjamin E. E. Kane  
Homily 1 Kings 19:1-15, "Eat"  
Sunday, June 19, 2016

All week long I've thought about food. I've thought about big tables full of good food—southern food and Chinese food and fruits and vegetables that seem to be sprouting everywhere these days; all of these foods are together on a big table. And that's what I've been thinking about this week.

Part of me wonders if I've thought about food so much because I'm sad. And I'm angry and I'm tired. After the news from Orlando where 49 people were killed I felt helpless. We had a wonderful worship service together last Sunday and walked out into the beautiful sun and the news hit us at different points.

And the news hasn't stopped hitting us. We are talking about terrorism, homophobia, gun control, politics, Islam, fundamentalism and safety. And I'm thinking about food. And I think I'm thinking about food because I can't stop hearing God's command to Elijah, "get up and eat."

When we meet Elijah this morning he is on the run and in hiding. He's run from Queen Jezebel and King Ahab. They want to kill him and so he runs to hide. He's in a cave and he prays for a quick death from God. The man who runs from one death wants his God to kill him. It's ironic. And I imagine God laughed when God heard Elijah cry out for death.

And then God responds. "Get up and eat." Elijah has run away from people who want to kill him and is hiding in a desolate, isolated place wanting to die and God says, "Eat." We are surrounded by death and sadness and may feel isolated as to what to do and I'm thinking about food.

I think it is providential that we are gathered here in the Fellowship Hall this morning. This space is where we eat. It's where our food is prepared and where it is consumed. As we were setting up this space this week I thought about all the fellowship halls I've been in. A church isn't a church until it has one of these classic fellowship halls. The linoleum square tiles, the stacks of chairs and the attached kitchen are constant reminders that you are in a Presbyterian church.

I thought about the pancake breakfasts we hosted in California. The youth would wake up early and cook as many pancakes as we could to raise money for our mission trips. People graciously ate undercooked and overcooked pancakes—we were pretty good at spotting the perfect ones and need to consume those for sustenance. I thought about the brownies Miss Martha made at the church in Nashville. And how over time I subtly let it be known that I didn't like the walnuts in the brownies—because it took away from the overall flavor. And I remember the day when I received my own tin can of brownies, made just right for me.

After these thoughts and memories fade I imagine it's time to move forward. Memories make us smile and remind us of happier times—but they aren't reality. So after I cherish the memories I get back to work. I think about how to move forward.

I start to think about all the conversations we need to have—about guns, about violence, about mental illness and acceptance of LGBTQ people. Not only that, but Islam, fundamentalism, and how to talk to each other without yelling. When I think about these things I dream about great leaders coming forth to lead us in these conversations. I think about politicians and preachers and teachers and others whom God has called to lead us forward. I think about a plan—like what God gave Elijah at the end of our text—a plan.

Elijah is to go to Jehu and Hazael and anoint them as kings; he is to go to Elisha and anoint him as prophet-in-training. So I start thinking about who the modern-day Hazael and Jehu's are; I wonder who the next prophet is? I think about the fact that our denomination is currently holding our General Assembly in Portland, Oregon where commissioners and other elected leaders of our church are talking about important issues like money, faith and who will lead us. And I wonder if the next Hazael's and Jehu's and Elisha's are out there?

But Portland feels far away. And then I wonder if what happens out there will really affect us? Does it matter that last night our church elected two women to serve as Co-Moderators of the General Assembly? Does it matter that they will lead us for the next two years even though they don't hold that much power?

When I sit with these thoughts I get hungry and I think about food. I start to wonder if food is an escape. I wonder if I think about food when the questions in my life become too big to consider. Instead of pondering the answers to the questions about our General Assembly I think about On the Square. I think about the fact that one of the first things Lydia and I talked about when we were flying home after our visit here in December of 2013 was all the amazing food we ate with the search committee.

As we talked about what we thought of the church and the town and the people we kept talking about how amazing the food was. I told her about how I tried really hard to pay attention to questions the committee was asking, but it was so hard because there were these amazing cupcakes sitting on the table at Mary Ann and Rusty's house. They were asking great questions about ministry and my gifts and telling me about the church and I was distracted by a cupcake.

Then I remembered how our conversations flowed freely and easily when we were eating together around the different tables. I remember the side conversations that happened during dinner when I learned more about the little details of each member of the search committee's family. Relationships were formed over food. We knew we could trust each other after sitting down to eat together. We knew that a long-lasting relationship was possible because we broke bread together. And we knew we could love each other—all because we ate together.

Before Elijah hears God's plan; before God tells Elijah to go to the Hazael and Jehu and Elisha; before God shows off God's powers in the wind, earthquake and fire and finally speaks

through the sheer silence—before God calls Elijah to journey forty days and forty nights to the holy mountain of Horab—before any of that, *God tells Elijah to eat.*

It is so simple. In fact, it is too simple. Eat.

God always meets us at the Table. Before Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden, God gave them food for the journey; before Abraham heard that Sarah would conceive a son, he ate with the three angels; before Moses and the Israelites left slavery in Egypt, they ate the Passover meal; before Elijah was to announce God's plan, he ate; before Jesus walked to the cross on Calvary, he ate with his disciples; and before Jesus announced his resurrection to his disciples he sat down with them at a table and on the beach and ate.

“Come, take, eat—this is my body broken for you. Come, take, drink, this is my blood shed for you.” God's always been at the table. This is where plans are made. This is where God's voice is proclaimed; this is where we learn how to be together as a community.

This past week I sent a note out to the Session like I do every Friday. In it I offer some prayer requests that I know of. I also included a little note I titled, “What I'm thinking about this Summer.” In this note I told them about the ideas, plans and questions I'm thinking about this summer. I told them that I'm praying about what the church's needs are and where we could focus our attention in the fall and spring. I'm thinking about where we need to grow our staff and ministries and how we might do that.

As I looked over the document I thought, “We need to eat together.” I realized that we need to talk and enjoy each other and consider some great questions—and we need some food to help us. I thought about how we are all ready for big plans and new leaders and vibrant ministries and exciting things to do—and that all of those start with a good meal and an even better conversation. And I think about the difficult conversations we need to have about guns, terrorism, homophobia, acceptance of all people and safety.

I some times wonder if God keeps reminding us of food because we have forgotten that step. We jump right to the plans and the anointing of leaders without fully understanding what we are doing. We think we know who everyone is and what they need and so plans are needed. Because we are so desperate to move forward we forget that we need sustenance for the journey.

And that sustenance comes from food and fellowship. So let's eat. Let's make a point to gather around the tables of our lives to share our stories and our hopes and our dreams while we dine together. Let's slow down and listen to what God is telling us through the meals we consume together.

Get ready to eat this fall and spring because God's ready to feed us.