



Elijah Icon 18th century

Basilian Aleppian Order collection of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church (Here, a Raven, a messenger from God, feeds him bread. In the Icon we see also the journey Elijah *will* take to stand in a cave on Mt. Horeb and meet God.)

Elijah retreats into the wilderness, fleeing for his life after Jezebel learns of the death of Baal's prophets. Elijah runs, walks, stumbles into the deserted wasteland, weary enough to die, and cries out to God. Falling against a small tree he falls into a deep sleep.

Perhaps you have known that sleep of exhaustion and terror—when even dreams cannot rouse you in restlessness? In a sleep that cannot plan for the morning, the body, the mind, the spirit rest.

In the next few lines, we learn God's response - God wakes Elijah and provides bread and a jar of water - even as God once provided manna and water for the people fleeing from Egypt. And again, Elijah falls into a deep sleep. Again, God *wakes* Elijah, providing "a cake" and water so that he might have strength for the journey - another 40 days and 40

nights... There is no admonishment of Elijah, only nourishment for the journey. The angel ministers to Elijah's deepest needs of sustenance and care. In the weakness of his body and his spirit God comes to Elijah. God is with Elijah. Elijah journeys to meet God (remember "a still small voice"?). Elijah needs this nourishment of body and soul in order to continue "walking in the way of the Lord". In time Elijah will anoint another prophet who will walk with him and then take his place speaking to God's people and to the people in power.

What is this need for sustenance that God provides? What is this bread of the wilderness that Jesus himself provides to the all the people who hunger and thirst—even in lonely and deserted places?

Indeed, the people do not even always ask for it; compassionate hearts notice the need.

God's own self provides...

For us and for all...

Susan+

An Expanding Love

The God of Welcome

The Rev. Stephanie Spellers is a leader in the Episcopal Church, working with Bishop Michael Curry to spread a message of God's inclusive and expansive love. She tracks how we move from a love of self, and those like us, to a generative love for all:

Looking closely at the witness of Scripture, we see a God who not only seeks relationship and union with the creation but who reaches out intentionally for everyone, and in particular for the outcast. Regardless of how unclean, unworthy, insignificant, or marginalized we may feel, or others may claim we are, the God of grace and welcome shatters every barrier to embrace us and draw us home.

Lest we think the welcome is meant for us or our group alone, the Scriptures are filled with reminders to God's chosen ones that they are *not* the only ones God welcomes. In Deuteronomy, Moses speaks to the Israelites as they journey from slavery in Egypt and through the wilderness. The frightened, tired and confused clan no doubt sought comfort in the knowledge that their covenant with God made them special. They soon learned that there is no rest for God's chosen ones. Instead, God's people are called out for a special mission.

The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:17–19)

It is true that God stands with God's people through every trial, but not so that they will sit comfortably with the privilege of apparent divine favor. Now they have to stand in solidarity with, graciously receive and *welcome* the vulnerable ones within their community and beyond it whom they might find it most difficult to accept: the orphan, the widow, the stranger, The Other. God has done it for them. Now they are called to respond in kind, literally imitating the God who graciously welcomed them.

Is not this the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see them naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (Isaiah 58:6–7)

God has made it clear: if you love me you will work for liberation with the oppressed and marginalized in your midst, and you will share your home and food with those who have none. You will not hide from the brothers and sisters I have placed near you. Rather, you will actively go out to meet them and draw them to yourself, even if it is risky, even if you feel uncomfortable.

Reference:

Stephanie Spellers, *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation* (Church Publishing, Inc.: 2006), 36–38.

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