

A Cookie and a Nap

1 Kings 19:3-8

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Some of you know that my son Weldon and his wife Anamika presently live in Colombo, Sri Lanka, where she serves as a diplomat. They rotate in two- or three-year stints around the world, and we ordinarily get to see them only once a year, when they are on home leave. So, I am anxiously waiting for them to arrive toward the end of July.

I don't know anyone else like Weldon in the whole world. He is deeply and widely self-educated. After getting a degree in liberal arts, he became a self-taught computer systems administrator. He is a certified translator in seven languages that he taught himself, including Sanskrit and ancient Greek. He is working as a disc jockey right now, for a small club in Colombo that plays throw-back house music. But he knows classical melodies, or jazz, or blues just as well. He drops quotes from Shakespeare and Hemingway and the Bible into conversation at the drop of a hat, and I can't always keep up with them. I suspect he could do the same in several other languages. He can hold his own in conversation at embassy parties with people from around the world. Weldon is the most interesting person I know, and he is also a genuinely nice man. I hope you get to meet him.

I have described Weldon to you in some detail so you will understand why I never know what to expect when I hear from him. It could be anything, and it is always intriguing. So, one day, I find this one-sentence email from Weldon in my inbox, the kind of message I would only get from him. With no context, he asks: Hey Mom, is it true that Elijah was having a tantrum, and God told him to just have a cookie and a nap?

That threw me for a minute, but as I thought about it, I realized he was right. He was referring to today's scripture, and I like his take on it. So, I responded, "Yep! That's pretty much what happened!"

So, let's review the Elijah story (which I am sure you remember from when I told it to you last fall) and find out why Elijah has a tantrum and why he needs a cookie and a nap. So, as you recall, Israel's King Ahab marries Queen Jezebel, a worshiper of Ba'al. He allows her to import hundreds of prophets of Ba'al into Israel, and they set up holy sites for the worship of Ba'al all around the land. Israelites start flocking to them, and God is not pleased with the situation. So, God calls Elijah to challenge the prophets of Ba'al and show which God is truly in charge.

Elijah sets up the challenge up on Mt. Carmel. Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al each build altars. They each slaughter animals to be burnt on those altars as sacrifice. Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al each pray to their god to rain down fire on their altar to burn the offering. The prophets of Ba'al pray for hours. They dance around the altar. They do everything they know how to do. They wear themselves out. No fire from Ba'al. Then Elijah calls on Yahweh to send fire, and BAM! Fire shoots down from heaven right on the altar. The God of Israel demonstrates God's power over the false god Ba'al, and in the aftermath, all the prophets of Ba'al are slaughtered.

This makes Queen Jezebel really mad. She finds Elijah and screams at him, "In the next 24 hours I will have you slaughtered just like them!" So, Elijah, fearing for his life, runs away, out into the desert. He runs as far as he can and finally, exhausted, he screams to God, "Just kill me now." Then he lies down under a broom tree and falls asleep.

Eventually, God sends an angel to take care of Elijah. The angel wakes Elijah up and gives him a little cake, cooked on a hot stone – basically a cookie! – and a flask of water. Then Elijah goes back to sleep again. The angel comes a second time, with another cookie and some more water, and says, "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you." Elijah eats and drinks and sets out once again, on the strength of that nourishment, for his destination, which is the mountain of the Lord, Mount Sinai.

Elijah has been doing God's work, and if you read further in the text, you can see that he doesn't understand why it has cost him so much. I guess he expects everyone to praise him for doing what God called him to do. It isn't easy, being the prophet of the Lord, and it doesn't always win praise. Telling truth to power – that is, demonstrating God's truth in the face of earthly power – is not for the faint of heart. If you ruffle the wrong feathers, it can cost you your life.

Elijah, who is fairly new to this prophet business, is surprised at the cost of it. So, he runs until he runs out of steam. He runs until he wants to give up, until he wants to die. Then he has a tantrum. He screams at God, "Just kill me now!" And God sends an angel to say, "You still have farther to go, more work to do. Have a cookie and a nap, or you will never get there."

Weldon was right. A tantrum, a cookie, and a nap.

Being the people of God, the Body of Christ, is hard work even in 2024, too, even in beautiful Center Harbor, New Hampshire, in the second most secular state in this nation. We are doing our best to live out God's values in a community that may not share those values. There is no queen threatening to take our lives for it, thank God, but it is still hard work. Making decisions together when we don't always agree, that is hard work, too. Keeping this building and grounds running is hard work, especially when there is a bear who is determined to get into our business. Making worship happen each week is joyful work, but it never stops. Teaching children, making music, taking plastic recycling over to Laconia to be picked up – all of that is work.

This summer, we all need a cookie and a nap. God says so. We have a long journey ahead of us. We will never get there if we don't take a break, and now is a great time to do that.

I will be splashing around in the lake with my grandchildren for the next couple of weeks. I will also take a few weekdays off when Weldon and Anamika arrive later in the month. Visiting with family that I rarely get to see restores my soul.

The Cabinet and all the Boards will be skipping their monthly meetings in July. Good for them! Now, I know that there are several church activities that will happen while I am away. Carol Asher will lead worship for the next two weeks, and I thank her for that. We have wonderful volunteers who will register runners for the Fourth of July Footrace. And the annual craft fair and yard sale will happen on July 13th. Many wonderful volunteers will be doing the Lord's work on those days, and I am so grateful to everyone who has signed up. But then, I am telling you ... God is telling you ... to take a break. Have a cookie and a nap. Do whatever it is that restores your soul.

Because we have a long journey ahead of us, with more of God's work to do, opportunities to praise God and love others in God's name, opportunities to care for the building and teach the children and make a joyful noise to the Lord. We won't be able to do that if we don't have a break now.

So, don't feel guilty about taking a rest, even a rest from church work. We all need it. Even God says so. Have a cookie and a nap.

Amen