

I've just returned from Holden Village, where I spent several days with a few members of Phinney (including hikers) and a couple hundred other people from around the world.

If you've ever been to Holden Village, then you know that it is a place where the supply of bread really is eternal. Any time of day or night, you can head to the dining hall and pop a slice of freshly baked bread into the toaster to enjoy a little piece of heaven. And so it was not lost on me that I was there, in the wilderness, enjoying abundant bread that never runs out while we are smack-dab in the middle of this five-week series of scripture readings that revolve around the theme of "bread."

Again today, we hear Jesus saying something that really is strange, when you think about it: "I am the bread of life." That's a strange thing to say. And by itself it can easily be one of those vague, churchy phrases that we say without even understanding. One of those things the Church says that is foreign and weird to other people. What does it mean to be the "bread of life?"

On the contrary though, our other readings this morning aren't vague or metaphorical at all. They are stories that we can actually sink our teeth into.

In First Kings we get this section of Elijah's story, just this small scene where he is in the wilderness, ready to die...*wanting* to die, even. How did he get there? Well, Elijah had a hard job. He was called by God to speak a hard truth to a corrupt and evil king, Ahab. Now, Elijah was never alone in this. God had provided for him over and over again by this point, and he has participated in amazing miracles. Read the whole story – it's quite a drama.

But at this point in the story that we hear today, Elijah had angered the king and his wife, Jezebel, so badly, that they were out to get him. They were looking for him so that they could kill him. And Elijah was, understandably, terrified. He was so afraid of what might happen to him next that he just wanted God to peacefully take his life – to let it end right then and there in a less frightening way. He wanted God to spare him from any more of this difficult journey.

And when I read that line, "It is enough now, Lord," I thought, *Oh, do I resonate with Elijah.*

How many times have we been there? Maybe not to the point of wanting to die -- or maybe so -- but how often has the pain of the world or the fear of the next thing been so paralyzing, that we just don't want to face it? How many times have we said to God, "That's enough. It's too much."

I have felt that way. I bet you have, too.

We all face those moments when we have come up against something so hard, or so scary, or so sad -- that we just don't want to face it. It happens in big ways in our world -- war, death, violence. But that same feeling can overwhelm us even in day-to-day ways, too.

We might feel that way when we get over-worked and it feels like there is too much on our plates and we can't possibly get it all done.

We can feel that way when we are grieving, and our new life without this person we love is so foreign and so sad -- that we just don't want to go on.

We can feel that way if we suffer from anxiety or depression or addiction or abuse. These things, though not at all our own fault, can feel like they have no solution -- no way out.

Think for a moment. Take an inventory of your life right now. What is something you are dreading? Something hard that you have to do, or get through? Can you think of something?

I have a friend, Shannon, who has three small boys. And recently she sent me a picture of one of the kids -- my godson -- in his room. It was a sweet picture, of course. But what caught my eye was a little sign on his dresser that had just five words on it: "We can do hard things."

We can do hard things.

What a wonderful message to wake up and see each day. Because all of us -- even children -- face hardship. We do and we will though out our lives. But hardship doesn't have to destroy us. And that's what God taught Elijah that day in the wilderness when he was too afraid and too overwhelmed to go on.

You can do this, Elijah. Here is some bread. Because you can do hard things, but you can't do it on an empty stomach.

In Ephesians, we have Paul writing to people who are also facing something hard -- conflict. Oh I think conflict is one of the biggest hard things in life. It's painful when we have a disagreement with someone we love -- *or* with someone we have to deal with -- because they are our colleague or our neighbor.

Sometimes what divides us is so strong, and our positions are so *firm* and so righteous, that it really doesn't seem possible that we can ever reach a compromise, let alone peace.

I love that Paul gives us permission to be angry. Oh, thank you, Paul! We've been waiting for that!

Sometimes we are angry. Sometimes we really should be angry!

I went to Washington DC a few years ago, and it was right after the new memorial for Martin Luther King Jr was installed. There's a large statue of him there. And it drew quite a bit of criticism when it first went up because people said it wasn't a nice depiction of him. They said his face looks too angry.

Well guess what? He *was* angry. And he had every right to be angry! So yes, be angry when anger is appropriate. But don't end there, Paul says. Don't let anger be where you stop.

Move forward and speak the truth that needs to be spoken. Anger is the easy part. Following Jesus is the hard thing.

Because we are, in fact, called to be imitators of Christ. And not just the sweet, docile, well-behaved Jesus that we see depicted on statues and in paintings. We are to be imitators of the one who overturned tables when the institutional system was harming those in need. We are to be imitators of the one who shocked and scandalized communities when he dared to talk to prostitutes and tax collectors and to touch lepers and blind and the dead. We are to be imitators of the one who called out corruption and false piety and who threatened tradition and made people uncomfortable. All of the hard things Jesus did led him to his death. Because hard things are not always popular things, and sometimes telling the truth gets us in trouble.

But we can. We can do hard things.

We just can't do them on an empty stomach. We can't do the hard things we have to do unless we are filled with the right stuff. And this is where it gets tricky.

Because the world is full of empty calories. We are fed a steady diet of fear and anxiety. We are fed a steady diet of distrust and individualism. We are fed a steady diet of shame and blame.

And when we consume all of that, we really can't move forward in very healthy way. We won't be able to continue well on our journey. Those things try to consume us -- so that we are no longer able to be the body of Christ in the world -- doing hard things, serving others, loving, forgiving, overturning tables, speaking truth to power.

Instead, to be the body of Christ in this world -- to do the hard things -- we are going to need good sustenance. We are going to need to be filled with something more powerful than the world can dish up.

And suddenly it makes sense.

Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." And we understand. Jesus is offering us all we need -- his own self, his own love, his own promise that we are loved and cared for and capable of being the people God created us to be. That's the good stuff we need to keep going on our journeys.

And that's why we are here today. Worship isn't the destination, you know. It isn't the "Place you go" on Sunday mornings as if it's an event of its own.

Coming here is more like stopping by the Hike Haus at Holden Village. It's the place we stop to get the gear we need for the journey through the wilderness. The place we stop to get refueled and nourished and equipped with Jesus himself.

Whenever it feels like too much -- whenever it feels like you just can't go on -- check your diet. What are you consuming to get you through your journey? If it's fear and worry and shame and doubt, then you're not going to get very far. But Jesus offers something very different. Something very good. And we can trust that that is enough.

Amen.