

Get Up and Eat!

1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 130; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6: 35, 41-51

“Get up and eat!” Not unlike last week, our lessons take on the form of a sandwich. One piece of bread is our first reading from the Hebrew Scriptures. Once again the Lord provides food for his servant, this time Elijah. Elijah is ready to hang it all up. In fact, he asks if he might die. And what’s the response he gets? “Get up and eat!” says the angel of the Lord. The food he needs appears and he is strengthened for the journey ahead. Our Gospel is the other piece of bread in this sandwich – literally. Once again we hear Jesus proclaim, “I am the bread of life...whoever eats of this bread will live forever”

And the meat in this sandwich today? Our second reading, which is still coming to us from Paul’s amazing letter to the Ephesians. What a gift to have this meat to chew on. Eugene Peterson, who wrote the Message Bible also wrote many other books. One of them is called “Eat This Book.” He says “Christians don't simply learn or study or use Scripture; we *assimilate* it, take it into our lives in such a way that it gets metabolized into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus' name, hands raised in adoration of the Creator, feet washed in company with the Son.”ⁱ Paul’s letter to the Ephesians emerges in the lectionary every three years for us to assimilate. I encourage you to read the whole letter in one sitting. It’s only 4 ½ pages in my Bible. And what a treasure.

Today Paul gives us in this letter some meat to chew on about anger. “Be angry, but do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.” I love that. I love that we don’t hear, “Don’t be angry.” No, here you have it. The Bible affirms that it’s OK to be angry. Anger is an emotion. As an emotion it is neither good nor bad. It just is. And it’s information. Anger can be a force for destruction or used for creative change. Anger is energy stored in the body. It will seek action and release.

If only it could be harnessed like the energy of the wind. When it’s stored in our bodies, it contributes to stresses and tension. It contributes to illness. When it’s not dealt with openly in relationships in a timely manner, there is tension. And that’s where we make room for the devil. When we don’t nip it in the bud, we create space for seeds of mistrust and resentment and misunderstanding to fester and grow. And then we distance or cut off. That may provide short term relief, but ultimately it makes things worse in the long run. Meanwhile the anger is still there in our bodies, wreaking havoc on our mental and physical health.

Anger can also become a habit. The good thing about bad habits is that they can be broken. I think that’s what Paul is getting at when he says “Don’t let the sun go down on your anger.” Another way of thinking about this is to think about being a *steward* of your anger. How can this energy be used to build up, rather than to tear down and destroy? Saints are not people who don’t experience anger. They just know how to be good stewards of their anger.

The Dalai Lama offers a four step process for transforming anger. Like Paul, he doesn’t suggest that we shouldn’t be angry. I’m sure Jesus approves the process. It requires that we be honest with ourselves. First, write down what is making you angry. Take all the time you need. Second, ask yourself. “Did I contribute anything to this situation?” Write that down. Third, ask yourself, “What was the other person’s perspective? What was their view of what happened? Were they doing the best they could? Were they in over their head? Were they dealing with a new situation?”

Sometimes it’s *God* we’re angry with. And that’s OK too. God can handle it. If that’s the case, we might ask, “What was *God’s* perspective?” Was I being given a challenge to overcome? Am I being requested to improve my life or the lives of others?

Fourth, anger is a perceived injustice. If you’ve gotten this far in the process and still feel anger, either you hid something from yourself along the way, or an actual injustice was done. Each of us has the responsibility, as we assimilate these words today, to find ways to release this energy and direct it in a way

that will build up. Mothers Against Drunk Driving, or MADD, is a great example of transforming anger. It was formed by parents angry over the death or injury to a child or other loved one.ⁱⁱ

The rest of our second reading from Ephesians bears repeating. It's such good meat to chew on. Especially given the news I received yesterday. I was in Battle Creek attending a workshop on building an inclusive church. And at the end of the day I checked my voicemail. There was a message from a number I did not recognize, from Gaylord Michigan. It was from Julie O'Brien, Pat Delany's daughter. When her children made their daily morning phone call to Pat on Saturday there was no answer. Pat's son drove to Northville immediately. He found her, all dressed, lying on the couch, with a smile on the face of her lifeless body. In Julie's message she said they were rejoicing that their 93 year old mother has crossed the Jordan and has probably already started a Bible Study group in heaven.

After I shared this news with 93 year old Father Lew Towler, also known as AlleLEWia, he sent this email: *Dear Pat. You were my inspiration in life and now as you cross the River Jordan, you are again my inspiration. I mean, what a glorious way to go! In your own home sweet home which you and Bob blessed by your presence, lying down on your comfy sofa, with a Pat Delany smile on your face and the words, "Hello King Jesus!" on your lips. You were a blessing to us in your life and your final gift to us is to be a blessing to us in your death. May a thousand Alleluias ring out, joining heaven and earth.*

So I'd like to repeat the rest of this reading because it so captures the Pat Delany we have been privileged to know and love as a leader and lover in this faith community. Last week on her way out of church after I had preached from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, she said to me, "That was just what we needed to hear." Today I think she'd say the same thing about these words which she assimilated and metabolized so well: *Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 4:29-5:2).*

Somehow Pat knew how to be a steward of her anger. You *know* she experienced it. She was a human being. What comes to my mind is the story of the Native American grandfather. He was speaking to his grandson about violence and cruelty in the world and how it comes about. He said it was as if two wolves were fighting in his heart. One wolf was vengeful, resentful, and angry. The other wolf was understanding, forgiving and kind. The young man asked his grandfather which wolf would win the fight in his heart. And his grandfather answered, "The one that will win will be the one *I choose* to feed."

So today, let's get up and eat. Let's join Pat and all the saints at the banquet table that our Lord prepares for us. Let's eat the love he pours out for us in the bread and in the wine. Let's get up and eat, and feed the wolf in us that is understanding, forgiving and kind. Let's get up and eat that living bread that gives Pat and all of us life eternal. Alleluia! Thanks be to God for our sister in Christ, Pat Delany. Amen.

Pastor Dana Runestad

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ⁱ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*

ⁱⁱ <https://courageandchoice.wordpress.com/tag/anger-management/>