

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to morning prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. Please rise as you're able, and join in our responsive Psalm 139. "Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me."

Congregation:

"You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from far away."

Elizabeth Propst:

"You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways."

Congregation:

"Even before a word is on my tongue, Oh Lord, you know it completely."

Elizabeth Propst:

"You hem me in behind and before and lay your hand upon me."

Congregation:

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is so high, I cannot attain it."

Elizabeth Propst:

"Where can I go from your spirit or where can I flee from your presence?"

Congregation:

"If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there."

Elizabeth Propst:

"If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits at the sea..."

Congregation:

"Even there, your hand will lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast."

Elizabeth Propst:

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me and the light around me become night..."

Congregation:

"Even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is bright as the day. For darkness is as light to you."

Choir:

(singing)

Elizabeth Propst:

This morning's reading is from 1 Kings 19:1. "Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. And then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, 'So may the gods do to me and more also if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.' Then he was afraid. He got up, and fled for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and he left his servant there. But he himself went a days journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die. 'It is enough now, oh Lord. Take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.'

"Then he laid down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones and jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him and said, 'Get up and eat. Otherwise the journey will be too much for you.' He got up and ate and drank. Then he went in the strength of that food for 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the Mount of God.'" Here ends the lesson.

So I like to pull from the lectionary when I've spoken at morning prayers before. I like the serendipity of it. I like the work of figuring out the relevance of each chosen story for our contemporary moment, and there always is a point of relevance. But this passage is actually not from today's lectionary. It's from yesterday's lectionary. Today's lectionary is a story from the gospel of Luke in which Jesus goes back to his hometown in Nazareth, and he goes to the temple, and he tells everybody he's the Messiah, and they get really mad at him, and they kick him out of the temple, and they try to throw him off a cliff.

And so I was reading that and I was like, "Okay, I've got to figure out something to say at 8:00 AM on a Tuesday about Jesus almost getting thrown off a cliff." And I had my little commentary on the gospel of Luke, and I had some articles pulled up on ancient Judean and temple etiquette, and I was ready to wrestle with this complicated story, and I was tired just thinking about it. And I was ready to go. I was ready to wrestle. I was ready for the difficulty of that story.

And then an email dinged into my inbox yesterday when I was doing this with yesterday's lectionary readings. And I paused to read those. And I read this story from Elijah where an angel appears and says, "Get up and eat. Otherwise, the journey will be too much for you." And I felt a little bit like laughing, a little bit like crying. I'm a senior at the college, I'm writing a senior thesis. It's due this coming Monday, and I've been, it's the kind of thing that objectively, it doesn't matter at all, but also it matters so much. And I've been working pretty hard on it because I want it to be good and maybe not taking care of myself as much as I could be. And a couple days ago, I had an awful headache, and I don't normally get headaches, but I had a headache.

And I was freaking out, and I was googling "warning signs of stroke?" trying... Just catastrophizing for no reason. And suddenly a little voice popped into my head as I was preparing to die. And the voice sounded a lot like an angel, which is to say it sounded a lot like my mother. And it said, "Have you had any water today?" And I had not. And so when I read this passage from Elijah, I found it pretty relatable. He's in the desert, and he lies down beneath a tree and he says, "I've had enough. This is enough for me. God actually take away my life. I'm through." And an angel appears and says, "Eat a sandwich, dude."

And I'm a wrestler by nature, I think. I like to over-complicate things, and quibble with things, and make things harder than they need to be, especially when it comes to our tradition where leaning into complexity is so fruitful so much of the time and feels so necessary so much of the time when easy

answers feel dangerous, and they feel like they have real impact on the ways that we act and the ways that we treat others.

And amidst that tendency to wrestle, I think often I forget that while God is the ground of every difficult truth that we're invited to grapple with, God is also the ground of every simple, and easy, and straightforwardly good answer. For every complexity that we're given God also gives us potato chips, and novelty sunglasses, and babies, and snowsuits; things that are easily and acceptably and generously good. And as much as we might be Jacob who grapples with God in the darkness, we are also Elijah to whom God appears and says, "Take care of yourself. Let me take care of you. The journey is already hard enough."

And so when I was reading this story yesterday, I was thinking about Lent; this season of repentance, this Lenten journey, which is just the journey of our lives, really. It's a journey through grief, through repentance, through loss, we reckon with our own failures. But these are not things that we do or feel during Lent alone. And so I'm thinking of Lent having read this story, not as a time where God asks us to magnify our pain or lean into our pain because it doesn't need to be magnified. It's hard enough as it is, and I'm thinking of Lent as a time to remember that through every valley of grief, and guilt, and darkness, God walks with us always. So when we feel the weight of the world smacking us flat across against the desert sand, or when I am smacked flat on the library floor, God doesn't say "Yes, wallow in your contrition. Feel the Lenten repentance. Give in to the struggle." God says, "Get up and eat. Otherwise, the journey will be too much for you."

Will you pray with me? God of joy and God of sorrow, the paths we travel are too precarious and too painful to walk alone. Feed our bodies and our hearts. When our heads are bowed in repentance, may we feel the weight and warmth of your hand upon us blessing us for the journey ahead. And now speaking the words that Christ taught us: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not to temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Please rise as you're able and join in our closing hymn, "Dear Mother God," number 204.

Congregation/choir:

(singing)

Elizabeth Propst:

Christ has no hands in this world but your hands and no voice in this world but your voice. So let our hands and our voices do the work of justice, and of love, and of care, for ourselves and for others today and all days. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.