

1 Kings 19:3b–8
Wed. of Invocabit (Ember Day)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
February 21, 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

This week is an ember week and today is an ember Wednesday. Ember days are days of repentance celebrated on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, in an ember week four times a year. The ember weeks are the week after the first Sunday in Lent, the week after Pentecost, the week after Holy Cross day in September and the week after St. Lucy day in December. An easy way to remember the ember weeks is from an old rhyme: “Lenty, Penty, Crucy, Lucy.”

The history of Ember weeks can be traced back to the 3rd century A.D., though many Early Church Fathers believed the tradition to originate with the apostles. The name “ember” comes from the Latin “quatuor tempora,” meaning “the four times.” Each season of the year is marked with time of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving as a reminder that the entire year and all of creation are to be used with Christian moderation. In this sense, the ember days are like a mini season of Lent occurring throughout the year.

The Old Testament reading for the Ember Wednesday in Lent comes from 1 Kings 19, the account of the prophet Elijah fleeing from wicked Queen Jezebel. We spoke quite a bit about Jezebel in our Sunday morning study of Revelation. There, Jesus tells the Apostle John to write to the church in Thyatira against their toleration of “that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.” Jezebel becomes a type or a symbol for any power within the church

that leads not to the true worship of God but to mixing the worship of God with the worship of demons.

Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, King of the Sidonians (1 Kg 16:31), a Canaanite people. She married Ahab, King of Israel, and led him to support Baal worship in Israel. She seduced the people and supported false prophets. Yet the LORD still had His prophets in Israel, even if they were for the most part hidden away. Elijah, in particular, openly denounced the false prophets of Baal. You know the story of how the false prophets of Baal were defeated. King Ahab gathered the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel. Elijah said: “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” The 400 prophets of Baal tried to get their god to consume the sacrifice, but all the weeping and wailing in the world could not do it. The one prophet of the LORD, however, Elijah, called down fire from heaven and the LORD consumed the sacrifice with fire, though it was drenched in water. Then the people seized the prophets of Baal and slaughtered every last one of them.

Of course, Queen Jezebel was upset by all this. She sent a message to Elijah, threatening his life: “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” Elijah had just seen all the LORD could do, how the LORD God fights for His people against false worship and false prophets. Yet Elijah was still afraid. People in high places sought his destruction. His life would be a life of hiding, seclusion, and evading the authorities. Elijah was afraid even to the point of death. He thought it would be better to depart and be with Christ than suffer at the hands of the wicked. Elijah fled to Judah and went a day’s journey into the wilderness, where he sat under a broom tree and asked the Lord that he might die. Elijah said: “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” Elijah did what he, as a prophet, was supposed to do. He confronted evil in high

places, yet the circumstances left him feeling alone and distraught. The hostility Elijah felt made him grow weary of life itself. He laid down and slept with the hope that he would not see another day.

But an angel touched Elijah and said: “Arise and eat.” Miraculously, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. Elijah refreshed himself and laid down again. The angel of the LORD came a second time and touched Elijah, saying: “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” On his own, Elijah does not have the strength to carry on with the Lord’s work. But the LORD provides. He sends His angels to guard Elijah in all His ways, to bear him up lest he strike his foot against a stone. The LORD provides for Elijah these two times to show Elijah that man is not able by Himself to accomplish anything. It is the LORD who works through His servants to accomplish His purposes, and He will give His servants, the true prophets, everything they need for the work at hand.

You, too, will often grow weary in this life, especially if you seek to remain faithful to the Word of God. You may at times flee into the desert for protection. You might be at your wits end and weary of life itself and you will want to say: “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” There are many times in this life you might feel you’ve reached a new low. Everything and everyone seems out to get you and you feel alone in the desert with nowhere to turn.

But the LORD will not leave you in the dumps. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy will come in the morning. What’s interesting in Elijah’s dark night of the soul is that his renewal doesn’t come all at once; it’s a process. That’s often how it goes with our own renewal. The LORD sends help piecemeal until we’re recovered. An angel came in the middle of the night and told Elijah to eat and drink. Then came more sleep. Again, the angel of the LORD comes to

Elijah and has him eat and drink again, saying “the journey is too great for you.” On your own there’s simply not enough strength to get through. The LORD must intervene to give Elijah the strength needed to carry out His duties.

Elijah arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. During Lent, we are often reminded of the 40 day season of testing the LORD leads us through. We use this time to mortify the flesh, to let the Word of God renew us as we ward off the temptations of the Evil one. Elijah’s 40 days in the wilderness didn’t get any easier. He was still wandering through the desert. But with the Lord’s provisions of food and drink He was able to make it the 40 days to the mountain of God.

Lent is not easy. It’s painful to lose our earthly comforts and to undergo necessary discipline. But the LORD does not leave us without help. He says to us: “Arise, eat and drink, for the journey is too great for you.” The journey of Lent is too great. The journey of your life is too great. It is a desert filled with dangers and deceptions everywhere you turn. But in the strength of the Lord’s food, you are given the needed strength to make it to the end, to the joy of Easter and the joy of resurrection.

We are not journeying to Horeb, the mount of God, with Elijah. Instead, during this Lenten season we are journeying to Calvary, the mount of God, with Jesus. There we see our LORD hunger and thirst for our sake. There we see our LORD at the end of His life, laying not under a broom tree but under the tree of the cross. Jesus was persecuted and chased away by Jezebel and the false prophets, by the servants of the Devil. He trusted in the LORD, and like Elijah, He grew weary of life itself. He died and yet arose in the resurrection, eating and drinking and giving His body for our food and His blood for our drink. In the strength of this food, you are able to withstand the time of testing this Lent and throughout your life. In the Word

of God, you are given the strength you need to recognize your sins and your weaknesses and to confess them, to turn to the free forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. You are given the strength you need to overcome Jezebel and all her false prophets, though the road seems lonely and bleak. Your LORD walked this road already and He walks the same road with you right now. He is with you always, even to the end of the age. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Magnificat.