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Pentecost 12

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Bread for the Journey”

Text: 1 Kings 19:4-8; John 6:41-51

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

*Elijah couldn't do it alone.* Even though he was a great prophet of God. Even though through him, God worked many miracles and spoke to His people, urging them to repentance and faith. At Elijah's word, it did not rain in Israel for over three years. And through those three years, while there was famine and drought in the land, God provided food and drink for Elijah, using ravens to deliver food to him, and making sure a widow's jar of oil never ran dry. When the widow's son died, God raised him back to life through Elijah. And then there was the great victory of God's power on Mt. Carmel, when Elijah defeated the 450 prophets of Baal in a contest to see whose god was the true God, once and for all. So of all people, after all that, one would think Elijah to be a paragon of faith and steadfastness.

*But Elijah couldn't do it alone.* When Queen Jezebel learned that her prophets and her god had lost to Elijah, she threatened his life – and fear and despair got the better of Elijah. For what good is miraculous food when you're going to die? Who would there be to raise *him* back to life? And so he journeys out into the wilderness, lies down under a broom tree, and tells God: *Take my life and let me be.* It is too much. . . . But God does neither. He doesn't take his life or leave him alone – He feeds him. Not once, but twice. And with no mere bread, but with bread that supplies strength for Elijah's entire journey, 40 days and nights. Bread that sees him through the wilderness, until he arrives at the mountain of God.

*Elijah couldn't do it alone.* But he was not alone. *Elijah couldn't do it alone*, but even if there was no one else to help him, he was not alone. And false gods, false prophets, and evil kings and queens were no match for the One who accompanied Elijah. The One who gives strength for the journey. The One who gives no mere bread, but **bread of life**.

*Elijah couldn't do it alone* . . . and neither can we. No matter how strong a Christian you are, no matter how strong your faith. How easy it is for fear and despair to get the better of us. How easy to feel abandoned and alone. How easy to lie down in our own little

corners and, like Elijah, tell God: *Take my life and let me be.* It is too much.

But such words show that we *are* trying to do it on our own, and relying on our own strength, our own intellect, our own words, our own ingenuity, our own wisdom and might. For if life is too much for us, it is *not* God's strength that has let us down . . . it's because we've (once again!) struck out on our own, through the wilderness, only to find out that the journey is too great for us. *We can't do it alone.*

But we try because the world tells us that we should be able to. Don't be weak, be strong! Don't be dependent, be independent! Right? Why go to the doctor when you can do it yourself on WebMD? Why go to a lawyer when there are software packages with all the forms you need? "Talk to Chuck" and invest your own money. Sell your house yourself. And even when it comes to pastors and church? Nah, you don't need 'em anymore. You can be spiritual yourself. *And maybe we even think we have to be that way in order to be pleasing to God.* Not be so dependent. Strike out on our own. Do great things for God!

*But Elijah couldn't do it alone . . . and neither can we.* In fact, when it comes to our spiritual life, we can't do it at all. I may *think* I can be the spiritual bread winner in my life, in my family, and maybe for a while it seems that I can. But what then, when your strength lets you down? When – sooner or later – you find out that the journey is too great for you? When the only bread your pride can buy you is filled with the maggots of sin and death? No, *Elijah couldn't do it alone, and neither can we.* We need the bread of life that only God can give. The bread that is no mere bread, but the bread which will see us through this life, through the wilderness, to the mountain of God. The bread of life. The bread which *gives* life.

*The journey is too great for us . . .* The journey through this life. The journey to the next. *But it is not too great for God.* And so as God came down from Heaven to help His needy prophet under a broom tree and give him bread, so He has come down to us needy people, to give us the bread of life that we need.

But to us He comes no longer as *the angel of the Lord*, as He came to Elijah. No, now He has come in an even greater way – this time, as a man. God and man together in one person. **A man to make the journey for all men, and God to give His life for the life of the world.** To do what we could not do. To make the journey we could not make. To give us the life we need. To come to us who are curled up under our own little broom trees, in our corners, beat up and beat down. Defeated by the sin without, and overcome by the sin within. Looking for bread, chasing after life, searching for hope. To us He comes, like He came to Elijah. Not waiting for us to first get to Him, *for the journey is to*

*great for us!* No, He comes to us. With bread, with life, with hope. With Himself.

And so the Son of God comes down from Heaven, and becomes a man. Born of the virgin Mary. Given the name Jesus. Raised in Nazareth. Yes, as His opponents pointed out, looking like everyone else . . . but *not* like everyone else. For there is only one reason He is here; there is only one reason for His life. **The Son of God came down from Heaven *alive* in order to come down from the cross *dead*.** He came down from Heaven alive, to live with all of us under our broom trees. So that all of our life-stealing sins not be *swept* under the rug and hidden – because that’s what we like to do with them, right? And pretend they’re not there! But they still *are* there. Eating away at us, making us afraid, causing division, despair, robbing us of our life. Broom trees aren’t the answer.

And so the Son of God came down from Heaven, *to lift the rug* where we try to hide all our sins – not to shame us because of them, but to set us free from them! To sweep all the guilt off of us, and sweep it all upon Himself. That **we** may live, and that **He** may die. Die for our sins. Die our death. For that is why He came. To give His life for the life of the world.

*And then He completes that journey for us*, that journey that is too great for us. For after taking all our sin and guilt, and dying our death, **He comes down from the cross *dead* in order to rise again back to life.** That His life might be our life. That we too would rise from the dust of death, and live with Him. And certainly that means in the future, at the mountain of God, when our journey through this life is complete! *But not only then*, but also **now!** That in Jesus and His life, we might rise from all the dust of sin and death that we’ve swept under our broom trees, and rise and live **now**. Free **now**. Life **now**.

Like Elijah. His journey wasn’t over yet, and neither is ours. God came to Him and gave Him life. He didn’t take Him out of this life . . . *yet!* God gave Him life, and food for the journey. And so too you and me. The day is coming when our journey through this life will be complete, and dying and rising with Jesus, He will take us to the mountain of God. Of that you can be sure. You have His promise. But He comes to give you life even **now**. To be your Saviour **now**.

And He does so first, in **Holy Baptism**, coming to you and giving you life. That as the Son of God was born a son of man, we sons of men might be born again as sons of God. And so you are. **Now**.

And then in His **Holy Word**, He comes to you and gives you life. First as His Word of Law “lifts the rug” where you’ve tried to sweep and hide all of your sin, and then with His Word of forgiveness which sweeps all that sin away. **Now**. For if He knows it all, He

also takes it all away.

And then He comes to you and gives you **the bread**; the bread you need for the journey. The bread of life. The very same body and blood once given on the cross, now given to you here. To give you the *faith* that you need; to give you the *strength* that you need; to give you the *forgiveness* that you need. **Now**. Giving you here not mere earthly food, since our journey through this life is no mere earthly journey! But giving you here spiritual food and drink, for the journey that will take you through this life, to the next. That joined to your Saviour – you in Him and He in you – the One who completed this journey for you, will take you through it with Him, to be with Him, to be with His Father, to the mountain of God.

*Elijah couldn't do it alone, and neither can we.* But you are not alone. So if you're going to curl up and hide under a tree, don't look for a broom tree! Curl up and hide under the tree of the cross, where God gave His life for you. His life for your life. To be the bread winner for you, and give you the bread of life. *The journey is too great for you*, but it is not too great for your Saviour. ***"I am the bread of life,"*** Jesus said. So come, dear saints; eat this bread, and live. *"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are all who take refuge in Him."* (Introit)

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.