

The Power of a Snack and a Nap  
Rev. Cindy Maddox  
June 12, 2022

1 Kings 19:1-13

Our text for today from 1 Kings needs a little back story  
in order to understand what is going on.

The prophet Elijah had been getting himself into trouble  
with Ahab, the king of Israel, and his wife Jezebel.

Jezebel was a worshiper of the god Baal,  
and had encouraged her husband to convert  
from Yahweh-worship to Baal-worship.

They had set up places to worship Baal throughout Israel,  
which didn't go over too well with Elijah.

Then Jezebel killed off all the prophets of Yahweh,  
except for 100 of them whom Elijah hid in a cave.

So Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a god-duel.

He said, "You set up an altar over there, and I'll set up an altar over here.  
We'll each cut a bull in half and place it on our altar,  
and then whichever god lights the offering on fire  
will be deemed the victor."

Well, the prophets of Baal took the challenge, but in spite of all their best efforts,  
their god did not set their offering on fire.

Elijah enjoyed a little bit of heckling as they prayed, asking them  
"Did your god fall asleep?" and suggesting "Maybe your god is on vacation!"  
Of course, when it was Elijah's turn, he couldn't resist a little extra showmanship.

He had his altar drenched in water three times,  
to make his victory even more dramatic.

And it was. God sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice AND all the water.

It was a tremendous victory, the highlight of any prophet's career.

But after the victory, the story tells us that Elijah responded to God's actions  
by taking all 450 prophets of Baal  
and killing them.

This is one of those texts that is hard to stomach.

Surely God didn't intend for Elijah to kill people  
just because of their religion.

There should be some punishment from God,  
or at least a divine rebuke for these senseless murders.  
But there isn't, and I don't like it.  
There is at least a decent explanation.  
Jesuit priest and peace activist Daniel Berrigan,  
in his book *The Kings and Their Gods*,  
“interprets 1–2 Kings as self-serving imperial records  
that portray Israel's kings  
as they saw themselves and wanted others to see them —  
God favors my regime and hates my enemies.”<sup>1</sup>  
So if this story of slaughter on behalf of God is little more than an effort to  
portray Israel's kings as they wanted others to see them,  
then it is easy for us to say,  
“This story is a reflection of the people who wrote the story,  
not a reflection of the God they proclaim to write the story about.”

With that background, let's read the next part of the story from 1 Kings 19.

*Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 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 Elijah was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.” Then he lay 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 a 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.*

I have heard it said that this part of Elijah's story can best be summarized with one line:

*Never underestimate the spiritual power of a snack and a nap!*

---

<sup>1</sup> Clendenin, Dan. [www.JourneyWithJesus.net](http://www.JourneyWithJesus.net).

It's a funny take on this story, and it is true!

Sometimes the world looks different after something as simple  
as a snack and a nap!

But of course the story was more serious.

It had been just a few days since his tremendous victory,  
surely the pinnacle of his prophetic career.

One threat from the queen and he had fled for his life.

Surely the God who had sent down fire from heaven  
could also protect Elijah from the queen's wrath.

But in addition to fleeing, his spirits sank into what we might today call  
depression.

He was despondent, despairing.

He didn't see reality accurately.

He said he was the only prophet of God left,  
when he himself had saved the lives of 100 of them.

He prayed to die.

And for the first time maybe some of us can relate to Elijah.

We can't relate to miraculous demonstrations of God's power.

We can't relate (I hope) to killing our enemies.

But we can relate to depression.

A few years ago a colleague of mine told the story of how she was called  
to pastor the church of her dreams.

She had long identified this church as one she would love to pastor.

So when the well-known pastor there moved to another church,  
my colleague submitted her profile.

She went through the process. She was called. She was ecstatic.

Until she wasn't.

Until she ran herself ragged trying to wrap up the job she was leaving,  
taking no break between one high-pressure job and the next.

She tried to ask for help.

She tried to tell people in her life that she was slipping, but they didn't see.

"You'll be fine once you get started," they said.

"You'll be fine. You'll be fine."

She wasn't fine. She said her first sermon there was horrible.

It was under ten minutes long and emotionally flat,

and this from a Black woman who knows how to preach the gospel!  
She went into a depression  
and had to take a leave of absence from the church she had **just** started.  
She tells of standing in her apartment, staring out the window at the cityscape,  
and she said, "All I saw was death."  
She had the pinnacle experience of being called to a big pulpit  
and a prophetic ministry,  
and then she wanted to die.

There is so much stigma around mental health in our society.  
The brain is an organ, and when it malfunctions in one way,  
we consider it a medical problem,  
and when it malfunctions in a different way, we start placing blame.  
They didn't work hard enough;  
they should shake it off;  
mind over matter;  
count your blessings;  
just stop thinking crazy thoughts!

Now, I do not claim to understand all about depression,  
nor do I claim to know its causes.  
But I do believe that one of the contributing factors is the lack in our society  
of true rest.  
Our society runs on unfettered capitalism,  
and an unrestrained capitalism demands the sacrifice  
of human bodies and spirits for the sake of profit.  
Unchecked capitalism does not value rest or sabbath.  
It does not value human individuality or expression.  
It does not value mental health or self-care  
unless it's a value-added corporate benefit  
intended to cut costs and maximize profit.  
And so we work. And we work. And we work.  
And when we rest we still think about work.  
We do not give our minds time to relax.  
We do not give our spirits time to rejuvenate.  
And so we become short-tempered and short-sighted.  
We become angry and small-minded.

We need to rest.

In 2016 a woman by the name of Tricia Hersey created what she calls  
The Nap Ministry, an organization that claims to examine  
the liberating power of naps.

According to their website, the organization  
“engages with the power of performance art, site-specific installations,  
and community organizing to install sacred and safe spaces  
for the community to rest together.

We facilitate immersive workshops and curate performance art  
that examines rest as a radical tool for community healing.”

It sounds lovely, doesn't it?

A nap ministry. I'm imagining squishy pillows and cozy blankets  
at the end of each pew,  
or cots or mattresses in the assembly room.

I'm imagining creating a safe space where people could rest  
away from the demands of their hectic lives.

They would check their phones at the door,  
so they wouldn't be tempted to check them.

They would have no responsibilities for those two hours  
other than to do absolutely nothing.

It's a pipe dream, of course.

Such a space wouldn't get used, even if we were to do such a thing.  
We're too busy being useful to rest.

Besides, how can we rest when there is so much work to be done?

So much job-related work, yes, but also justice work.

How can we rest when we need gun reform NOW?

How can we rest when we need to protect democracy NOW?

How can we rest when we need to save our planet NOW?

In part it's about staggered breathing.

In a choir, when you can't hold a long note, directors will often tell you  
to stagger your breathing.

The trick is not to breathe when the person next to you does.

We all need to rest occasionally if we are to continue the good work.

We need to nourish our souls.

Never underestimate the spiritual power of a snack and a nap.  
The key is to wake up from your nap when you're done.

As lovely as the Nap Ministry sounds, it is about more than naps.  
It comes out of a framework called "Rest Is Resistance."

The creator writes, "My rest as a Black woman in America  
suffering from generational exhaustion and racial trauma  
always was a political refusal and social justice uprising within my body.  
I took to rest and naps and slowing down as a way to save my life,  
resist the systems telling me to do more,  
and most importantly as a remembrance to my Ancestors  
who had their DreamSpace stolen from them.

This is about more than naps. . . .

It is about a deep unraveling from white supremacy and capitalism.

These two systems are violent and evil.

History tells us this and our present living shows this.

Rest pushes back and disrupts a system that views human bodies  
as a tool for production and labor. . . .

Black people are dying from sleep deprivation

and our resistance to rest is a social justice and public health issue.

Capitalism was [manifested] on plantations during chattel slavery  
and is the same system that is driving the entire globe to exhaustion  
and a deep disconnection with our bodies and minds today."<sup>2</sup>

She goes on to say that any calls to rest that are not rooted in black experience,  
and in black theologies of liberation,  
are not worth listening to.

So I'm calling you to rest, AND I'm calling you—calling us—to study and learn  
about the need for rest within the Black community,  
and that doesn't sound restful, does it?  
It sounds like more work.

Yes, and yes.

Yes, I am calling you to rest.

And I am calling you—calling us—to continue to learn.

We can do both—sometimes simultaneously, sometimes in turn—

---

<sup>2</sup> Hersey, Tricia. "Rest is anything that connects your mind and body." February 21, 2022, [thenapministry.wordpress.com](https://thenapministry.wordpress.com).

because it's not always "doing nothing" that bring us rest.  
Tricia Hersey, the creator of the Nap Ministry,  
says that "Rest is anything that connects your mind and body."

Where do you find rest?

Yes, it could be your summer cabin or family vacation.  
It could be a good novel or poetry or music.  
It could be yoga or lovemaking or a walk in the woods.

Rest is anything that connects your mind and body.  
And when I typed that line, I put an extra letter in the word "rest."  
I typed "Reset is anything that connects your mind and body."  
And maybe that is part of the answer, too.  
We need to press the reset button—  
on our spirits, on our energy, on our relationships.  
Reset is rest, too.

Jesus said, "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy-laden,  
and I will give you rest."

That is my prayer for you this summer.

In all your travels, in all your packing and planning,  
in all your camp schedule juggling,  
may you find time—may you make time—  
for rest,  
to connect your body and your mind,  
to reset your energy.

Never underestimate the spiritual power of a snack and a nap.