

## Elijah, Meet Ted Lasso

### I Kings 19:1-8

**19** Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

<sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

### Prayer

This summer I've been taking lessons from Ted Lasso. And I wish you were here because I'd ask you to raise your hands if you are also spending some time with him this summer.

For those who haven't met the man, he appears on an Apple tv show by the same name. Ted is a Midwestern man going through a divorce who takes a job to coach "football" (soccer) in England.... And whose only qualification is some amateur American football coaching in US. As Trent Crimm, a reporter from The Independent, says to him at his first press conference.... "You're an American

who's never set foot in England, whose athletic success has only come at the amateur level, a second-tier one at that, and is now being charged w/ the leadership of a premier league football team despite clearly possessing very little knowledge of the game..." And Ted listens, nods, and prompts, "You've got a question there, Trent?"

When his boss Rebecca puts him off and won't engage with him, he brings her biscuits every morning and keeps returning to try and build a relationship with her....

He notices Nate, the clubhouse attendant who is used to being overlooked, and remembers his name. takes times to praise the way that Nate made the sports drink, and to engage him, ask his opinions....

Ted shows up with relentless positivity and unforgettable one-liners. When someone asks him "Do you believe in ghosts?" He replies, "I do, but more importantly, I believe they need to believe in themselves."

Today is the second Sunday of compassion camp, with our focus on "compassion helps me thrive." Elijah is an interesting character for exploring self-compassion, as we will get into soon.... But since this season of Compassion Camp invites us to creative imagination together, we get a little more space to stretch some boundaries.... And so I wonder, mixing thousands of years, what would Ted Lasso say to Elijah if they met under the broom tree? And how might those messages from Ted be holy messages about self-compassion?

In today's Scripture, we hear about Elijah running for his life, exhausted and despairing. He doesn't have the energy to go on—spiritually, physically, emotionally. And this angel shows up, takes a flaming coal like we saw in Isaiah, and gives Elijah a cake, a drink, and encouragement to sleep.

This passage is often used to reflect the message: Eat when you're hungry, drink when you're thirsty, take a nap when you're tired. God will provide for you in those places. And there is a lot to be said in support of this. How many of us have made poor choices when we were "hangry," a mix of hungry, tired and angry? How many of us have felt so much better after a good night's sleep

following an awful one? And this is not in any way a dis of naps..... Kathy has a shirt that says "I like to party. And by party, I mean, take naps." ☺ (ask her!)

But I think we are missing the message if we think that all that we need for self-compassion is to eat, drink, and lie down.

If we think that all we need to do when things are tough are eat, drink, and take a nap.

To have compassion for yourself is more than that.

To heal, to get up, to continue, to see yourself with compassion, always takes more than cake and drink and sleep.

So what do I think that Ted Lasso would say to Elijah?

Maybe something like this:

Elijah, man, say no sometimes.

Tell the truth.

And get help—because you need a team, and can't do this life thing alone.

Say no to what is asked of you sometimes.

We can say no to one thing because doing so lets us say yes to something else.

Now we know that the Bible has come through a lot of years and a lot of tribes to reach us.... And there's a lot in it that might not have actually happened, or at least happened the way it was described. But one of the things that happened in the story before today's is that Elijah thought God wanted him to kill 850 people, false prophets.... and he did.

And in some Sunday school interpretations of this, they celebrate it and say wow, Elijah, he was doing what God wanted and he destroyed those false prophets! His God won.

But imagine if he'd said no, I'm not going to do that. Then we wouldn't have met him when he was wrung out and fleeing for his life. Then Jezebel wouldn't have had it out for him.

So maybe—hopefully—we aren't having to say no to some violent set-up request that people pin on God.

But for us, our saying no can come in other, smaller, daily ways.

Brene Brown told a story about a time when she was away for work, speaking in multiple cities. She wouldn't return until after her child's school event, so she had communicated that to him. And then her schedule changed and she got home in time so that she could attend his event. But she said to him, "I really feel like I need some time by myself tonight, so I'm not going to attend."

And then a week later, her son had something scheduled at school and he said to her, "I don't want to go. I feel like I need a night by myself."

Through his mother saying no to one thing, she opened up for him what it was to say yes to something else. She modeled permission-giving and honoring one's inner voice.

So say no when you need to, as a practice of compassion for yourself.

Last week Molly Seidel captured the world's attention when the American runner earned a bronze medal in the Olympic marathon. She ran with the lead pack throughout the race, a group of people who had personal records in the marathon more than seven minutes faster than her own. "I was sticking my nose where it didn't belong," she said afterwards. "

But five years earlier, preparing for the 2016 Olympics, Molly had stepped away. She had dealt with obsessive compulsive disorder, depression and anxiety since the age of 16. She hadn't gotten help at the time, and all of that set the stage for her to have an eating disorder. And for a while, she flew on her lighter frame. She ran faster, and people told her she looked so good.... But her body couldn't withstand all she was asking of it. Within a few months, she broke both a vertebra in her back and her sacrum. A friend told her that she looked like she was dying. And she checked into eating disorder treatment the next day and began the long work of recovery.

Molly said of this time that she realized that winning titles and championships didn't mean anything to her—she was unhappier than ever after she had won. She realized that the "win at all costs" mindset was meaningless because winning wouldn't matter if you were broken and hate yourself.

Part of the key to her recovery was to recognize what is and address it, rather than hide it... To tell the truth about your life, which is the second part of self-compassion that I want to lift up.

Can't you just imagine Ted Lasso coming and meeting Elijah like some unlikely Midwestern angel.... And I wish I could do Ted's accent here but imagine it now..... Imagine Ted saying to Elijah, "Man, tell the truth about your life! No wonder you're all exhausted and hungry now and not even all the biscuits I could make you would fill you up. You're thirsty and not even all the brown water-dirt that England calls tea could end that thirst. Because there's more going on with you. Sure, Jezebel wants you dead, but also you haven't reckoned with the fact that you killed 850 people because you thought God told you they were false prophets!

Ted continues, saying "Sometimes there is something deeper that needs to be said and until it's said you can never be free. That is sometimes the most compassionate thing that you can do for yourself—tell the truth. Say what you've done. Or say what you need. Or say that you don't know what you need and that things are hard."

What about for us? Hopefully the truth that we need to speak is never that we have killed 850 false prophets—or even one. And maybe you aren't going away and hiding under a broom tree and making your despair obvious.

Maybe the truth for you is that you wake up at night thinking about the girls in Afghanistan. The truth that you are tired in a way where you need more than a nap. The truth that we are living in a world on the edge with climate change, and Afghanistan's crisis, and Haiti's earthquake, and the Delta variant. The truth that some ICU beds in this country are full and nurses are walking off the job. The truth that families of children under 12 who cannot be vaccinated hold every day, trying to make a dozen decisions where no answer feels good.

Brene Brown writes of feelings that came to her in midlife, but that I think these feelings of "unraveling" can apply to many of us from different ages right now.... She writes, "Unraveling is a series of painful nudges strung together by low-grade anxiety and depression, quiet desperation, and an insidious loss of control. By low-grade, quiet, and insidious, I mean it's enough to make you crazy, but seldom

enough for people on the outside to validate the struggle or offer you help and respite. It's the dangerous kind of suffering – the kind that allows you to pretend that everything is OK.

We go to work and unload the dishwasher and love our families and get our hair cut. Everything looks pretty normal on the outside. But on the inside we're barely holding it together. We want to reach out, but judgment holds us back. It's a terrible case of cognitive dissonance – the psychologically painful process of trying to hold two competing truths in a mind that was engineered to constantly reduce conflict and minimize dissension (e.g., I'm falling apart and need to slow down and ask for help. Only needy, flaky, unstable people fall apart and ask for help)."

So maybe Ted would say to Elijah, "Son, you've gotta remember that you're part of a team. You're not made to go through life showing up everywhere and saying, "Elijah here, party of one." Party of one, fleeing for my life. Because even when you can't see the people standing next to you, they're there. Maybe that's part of what this faith story is.

And sometimes the team that helps us includes people who use things like science and psychology.... Doctors and counselors who can be with us and want good things for us.... And sometimes the team includes people who never even know they're on it, like comedians who make us laugh or writers who make us think or singers who make us believe... And sometimes that team includes our Nana, or our favorite stuffed animal, or our friend we made in third grade, or our mail carrier who always has time to say hello, or the cat in our lap, or the person we said we would love until death does our part....

Sometimes our starting lineup needs to change... We have to sub out one person for another, move another back to reserves.... And that's all okay! Who needs to be on your starting line up right now?

And the team includes the people of this church, who help each other in all kinds of ways.... Just this week, more than a dozen people signed up to deliver a meal to a member recovering from cancer surgery.... This is part of how this church shows up for people. People here will cook for strangers, give someone they don't know a ride to the doctor....

And the team what we are on includes Jesus, the one who struck out over and over but kept going.... The one who lived when, just like all of us today, he didn't know what would come next.... but he did know that honey was sweet and salvation means all of us together. The one who lived when some people were greedy and others did the work of healing every day.... The one who told us that we were made to sometimes laugh hard on the beach with our friends and to sometimes sit down and cry because parts of life can be so painful, but to always remember that we are connected even in our tears....

So this summer, practice some compassion to yourself.

What do you need to say no to so that you can say yes to something else?

What do you need to tell the truth about?

Who is on your team?

And if you see Ted Lasso, believe him when he warns you about the tea!

Amen.

Benediction:

Go now into this day remembering

We're all on a team together.

Saying no can mean saying yes.

Telling the truth can open things up.....

And compassion is life!

