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Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost  
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*I Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34:1-8; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51*

I wonder if you, like me, have been astounded watching the Olympics the past couple weeks and witnessing what the human body can do: gymnasts whose strong core keeps them stable on a 4-inch balance beam or hanging by the rings; rowers and swimmers whose upper body muscles propel them through the water; archers whose keen eyesight centers their bows on the target; boxers and judo and karate athletes whose feet quickly move them away from or toward an opponent; basketball and soccer players who can sink or shoot balls from way far away into the net; runners and walkers whose legs hurl their bodies over hurdles and finish lines; tennis and table tennis players who seem to return impossible shots over the net...I could go on and on with how in awe I am of what these athlete's bodies can do. But I have to be honest, what the Olympics especially reminded me of this year is what my body cannot do, and never has been able to do.

Watching these amazing athletes perhaps makes most of us realize that we aren't capable, and likely have never been capable, of doing what these Olympic athletes do. Our bodies have never been that strong or that fast or that steady or that keen. In fact, our bodies may feel like they fail us more than they support us. Whether disease or injury or pregnancy or chronic pain or age affects our bodies, we may find that increasingly we can do less instead of more. And the older we get, the more exhausted we become. The more we feel like our bodies just can't go on.

In the reading we heard today in I Kings, Elijah's body and spirit was exhausted. He had just challenged the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and killed them when they failed to prove that Baal was God. And then Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab who worshiped Baal, threatened his life, and as it says earlier in I Kings 19, Elijah "was afraid, he got up and fled for his life." We hear in the reading today that Elijah fled a whole day's

journey into the wilderness and then collapsed under a broom tree. He was so mentally and physically exhausted that he asked God to take away his life. His body and spirit were so spent that he wanted to die.

I wonder if you've ever felt that spent, felt like your body was that feeble, so much that you've even wondered if God should take away your life. Interestingly, whenever someone in the Old Testament—like Elijah, like Jonah—said they were so exhausted or overwhelmed that they wanted to die, God always provided for them and helped them regain their strength. In this story in I Kings, after Elijah had fallen asleep under the broom tree, an angel of the Lord touched him and invited him to get up and eat, and he found a cake that had baked on hot stones and a jar of water. Twice he got up and ate and drank and, as the story says, he went in the strength of that food as he journeyed forty days and forty nights.

When your body feels spent, when you fall exhausted, when you feel like your body is failing you, what have you prayed to God about? What have you asked God for?

In the gospel today Jesus tells a large crowd of people, "I am the bread of life." Likely many in that same crowd had been there the day before when Jesus fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish. They had experienced how just a little bit sustained an enormous amount. Jesus was now saying to these people who were hungry not just in their bodies but also their souls that he was the living bread that could sustain them. Jesus promised them, "whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Just like for those crowds then, Jesus is the nourishment we need to keep going now – the living bread from heaven is not a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water, but Jesus offers himself in a little bit of bread and a tiny sip of wine as sustenance for the journey.

And did you hear why Jesus gave himself as the bread of life? So that one might eat of it and not die! When we feel like Elijah – our body so spent, so exhausted that we want to die, Jesus gives himself to us as bread to be our substance and strength so that we too can face the journey ahead, be it 40 days or 40 years. Receiving Jesus as the bread of life doesn't mean

that our bodies are magically changed into something they are not—we don't suddenly become Olympic athletes—but Jesus gives his flesh for our flesh, his body for our bodies, so that when our bodies feel spent, when our flesh feels like it's failing us, Jesus' body and flesh is enough to keep us going.

And it's helpful to remember that even Jesus' body wasn't an Olympic body. Jesus' resurrected body had holes in his hands and feet and side. But those "imperfections" are what made Jesus holy.

I wonder if our "imperfections" – our wounds, our diseases, our pain – the very places Jesus comes to fill and make whole – are what make our bodies holy, too. We are made in the image of God; as Paul says today in Ephesians, we are *imitators* of God. When you feel like your body is worthless, remember instead that your body is holy, it is an image of the God who created you, and whatever God creates, God sustains.

And one day when your body has fully run its course, when your body expires and is returned to the earth, the promise of Jesus is that your body will be made new in heaven, because whoever eats this bread— whoever is nourished by me—Jesus says, will live forever. Just yesterday when I talked with Linda Anderson about their dear loved one Dorothy Dahl who died early Saturday morning, she said, she's now dancing in heaven with her family. Her body is free and whole, and yours will be, too.

Perhaps what I've really been reminded of watching the Olympics while praying over these texts is that even though none of us has an Olympic body, our bodies *are* precious and holy because we are nourished by Jesus, the bread of life who gave his life for the entire world. Amen.