

**Sunday, November 10, 2024** *1 Kings 17: 8-16* "Don't Be Afraid"

**Comment before sermon:** Unholy laughter and jeering in political rally, referring to VP Harris as a prostitute with pimp handlers. Speaking of Black women's bodies as impure in the history of the United States because Black women were under the control of white men, unable to defend themselves or choose their own sexual behavior. White women's bodies were regarded as pure. God's people say God created all our bodies, male and female, calls them good.

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During a drought, the prophet Elijah is in exile outside Israel and asks a widow with a handful of flour and a spoonful of oil to feed him first before she makes a final meal for her son and herself. P.S. In trying to remember whether Elijah or Elisha came first, J comes before S in the alphabet.

### **Jesus explains his ministry through this text**

When Jesus first preaches in the synagogue in Nazareth (*Luke 4:14-30*), he claims the fulfillment of *Isaiah 61:1,2* (also *Psalms 146*) of the Jubilee Year. People are surprised by such a claim from a local boy. Jesus continues in verses 24 to 27 with reference to our text this morning, and to the story of Naaman the Syrian, saying that God provided for and healed people outside of Israel despite the needs of Israel. The people are outraged to hear that God's purpose through Jesus is God's care for Gentiles as well as Israel, and try to throw him over the cliff, vv. 28-30.

### **Surprising points of relevance to our own setting**

This text, selected from the lectionary, is surprisingly relevant to our own situation, as we ourselves are in drought.

This week a comfortable majority of the American people selected a President who, like Jesus Christ claiming fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, claims to be the only one who can solve the problems of the day. Supporters and opponents alike agree that our President-elect is boastful and not truthful. God works through sinners to accomplish his purposes. We accept our lawfully elected President.

It also seems clear that a major factor in their choice of leader is that Americans resent, as the people of Nazareth did, having the poor and the outsiders share God's blessings, which they consider exclusively theirs. The natural fear is that there is not enough to go around. We shall see if our President Elect does remove undocumented residents and whether that blesses our nation.

Finally, Zarepath, in Sidon, is still a dangerous place for women and their children. Now Sarafand in southern Lebanon, it was bombed by Israel on October 30, with about ten people, mostly women and children, being killed.

### **Faith development and exercise.**

- a. Where does Elijah get the nerve to ask this woman to help him? The drought had continued for parts of three years. It is God's judgment on Israel.

Who is he to put his own life first?

What has God taught him so that he is confident that the woman will not lose out?

Does it cross his mind that he might die with them, or does he know what will happen?

**Or**, is Elijah confident that God will feed him, and so includes the widow and her child in God's provision by asking for their help

- b. How does this woman find the faith to do as Elijah asks? She is not an Israelite within the covenant.

It is not just her own life but the life of her son on the line.

She is already a widow, unable to depend on the ordinary resources of a husband.

She has already experienced deprivation in the drought, reduced to one meal.

Somehow God has made her aware of his presence so she can respond.

When she puts God's promises first, the flour and the oil last until rain returns to Israel and the surrounding area.

Elijah is fed through the most desperate. The widow has a home with an extra room, so in the past, she had resources that she lost, but is now the poorest of the poor, without anyone to depend on.

We learn as the story continues (*1 Kings 17:17-24*) that when her child stops breathing she has been carrying guilt for some sin. She wishes that she had never come into relationship with God but had remained hidden, even if she had died. God, however, presses the relationship all the way to her wounded heart.

### **The foundations of this congregation's future.**

- a. This applies to us as individuals choosing to trust God and share our resources in the survival of God's people. Ouch.

- b. But also collectively.

Deb Belusa spoke to me about the two crowded worship services in the worship center, and the parsonage being torn down to make room for an educational wing for all the children needing Christian education. Was it 800 members?

We can never go back to what was, only ahead to what God is doing.

Could such a community of faith that depends only on God, and is open to outsiders really exist?

Who are we asking to support the future of this congregation?

Who is God leading us to, persons who seem unlikely partners in spiritual life and economic support for CCC?

Do we have the faith to ask people to support CCC with their last dime?

Are we willing to say that God will provide if they put the kingdom of God first?

How is this different from the "prosperity gospel"?

In "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you*" (*Matt 6:33*) the goal is not the material blessings but a life of blessing with God. Willingness to be poor and to die.

**Survival outside the boundaries of God's people? Dependence on the resources of the poor and those consumed with loss and guilt, rather than looking to the rich and powerful to provide?**

How can we possibly not be afraid facing a future with water scarcity, food scarcity and scarcity of the Word of God?

But what an abundant life if we could trust God!

## **Resources**

Leithart, Peter. 1 & 2 Kings. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible Series. Brazos, 2006. Pp.122-131

Robinson, J. The First Book of Kings. The Cambridge Bible Commentary Series. Cambridge University Press, 1972. Pp.197-204

Sawyer, Nanette. "The widow surrenders to the inevitability of her own starvation. Elijah acknowledges this and doesn't try to talk her out of it." Christian Century Magazine, June 1, 2010. Retrieved electronically.