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1 Kings 17:7-16 – *Elijah and An Unlikely Widow*

Preached at Trinity CRC

January 30, 2021

1 Kings 17:7-16

⁷ Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. ⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to him (Elijah): ⁹ “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” ¹⁰ So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” ¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

¹² “As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

¹³ Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land.’”

¹⁵ She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. ¹⁶ For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Elijah has been hiding out in the Kerith Ravine...

Having his food brought to him by ravens...

And drinking water from the brook.

One day he puts his canteen down in the small stream for a drink...

But when he goes to sip it, it is full mostly of sand.

The brook has dried up.

There is a drought in the land.

So the word of the Lord comes to Elijah and says:

“Go Zarephath in Sidon...”

“I’ve directed a widow to supply you with food.”

Now at this Elijah probably scratches his head.

First, “Zarephath in the region of Sidon.”

Do you remember last week, who was from Sidon?

Jezebel...

The passionate Baal worshiper...

The one who exclusively worships Baal, the foreign god of Canaan and Phoenicia.

Surely Sidon and surrounding areas are committed to Baal—

They don’t worship Yahweh there—

Why would God be sending Elijah to Sidon?

Then, Elijah scratches his head at the statement:

“I’ve directed a widow to supply you with food.”

“Widow” and “supply” probably shouldn’t be in the same sentence.

Widows back then are not like widows or single women today.

They didn’t go to night school and work toward an education;

They didn’t open up a day home to make ends meet;

They didn’t work at their career and support themselves and their families. (Dale Davis)

Being a widow meant that you had need...

You were poor and depended on the generosity of others.

Elijah’s probably thinking:

You want me to go to the pagan land of Sidon—

Headquarters of Baal worship—

And then rely on a widow to keep me alive?

But Elijah doesn’t question...

The prophet follows God’s word in obedience.

Sure enough he gets to Zarephath—

Finds a widow gathering sticks—

And realizes just how desperate things are for her.

“Excuse me,” he says. “Can you bring me a drink of water?”

She looks up with eyes that are too red and exhausted to be annoyed by his request...

A body too weak and emaciated to put up a fight.

As she turns away—

Leaving to get the man a drink—

Elijah sheepishly adds:

“While you’re at it, can you please bring me a piece of bread?”

“I swear to you,” she says with a tired and trembling voice...

“As the Lord *your* God lives...”

“I don’t have anything to give you.”

“All I have is enough for one last meal to feed myself and my son...”

“We’re going to eat it...”

“And then we’re going to die.”

This widow is in a desperate position.

Socially, she has no one to provide for her.

We’re not told the age of her son...

But it seems that he’s too young or incapable of providing for them.

Physically she is prepared to die of starvation.

There is a severe famine in the land...

And being part of the vulnerable population...

She is going to be one of the first to succumb to the lack of food.

Spiritually she is probably confused and defeated.

“Doesn’t Baal”—

“The god of the weather”—

“See my plight?”

“The one who brings the rain and makes the crops grow...”

“Won’t he provide for me and my son?”

She is resigned to her fate.

“I’m making a meal for myself and for my son”—

“Our last meal”—

“That we may die.”

Desperate words.

There was a story on CTV this past week...

About how things are right now in some parts of Afghanistan.

Because of a severe drought and years of war...

Conditions are leading people to sell their daughters into marriage.

Families are promising them to suitors when they are still young...

As young as 7 years old.

Many don’t have shelter to protect themselves from the freezing cold nights...

Burning small pieces of plastic they find just to try keeping warm.

Others have resorted to selling their organs...

Whatever they can do to keep their family alive for another day.

Desperation.

We’re not going through a famine...

But I’m sure some of us can relate to that feeling of desperation.

They say that the pandemic has been a field day for domestic abuse.

People who were prone to physical and mental abuse...

Stuck inside and isolated with their nightmare.

People who under normal circumstances wouldn’t turn to verbal or physical violence...

Now breaking under the stress of life.

It’s been a hard time for a lot of relationships...

Where differences of opinion are driving wedges between families...

And stress is causing a lot of conflict and change.

And for some of us as we look around the world and look at our lives...

We've started examining our world view:

“How do I make sense of all the suffering and I see?”

“Why's it happening and where's it all leading to?”

“What is stable when everything seems like it's about to break?”

Like the widow maybe we're desperate as some of our beliefs are cracking at the foundations...

Maybe we've given up on life and are thinking about doing something that cannot be undone.

Look at what God does.

God's grace comes to this widow in her desperation.

God sends his prophet with God's word—

To this pagan region...

To this small, insignificant town...

To this Baal worshiper who is calling it quits on life.

This desperate widow has done absolutely nothing to seek out the Lord—

She is actually aligned with the enemy kingdom as a Baal worshiper.

It is by God's initiative and God's doing that he goes to her.

And what God first does is challenge her, inviting her trust:

“Bring me a piece of bread please,” Elijah asks.

How cruel!

Essentially asking for the widow's last meal.

But then comes the word of promise:

“Go and do as I say...” says Elijah...

“For the Lord, the God of Israel says, ‘the oil and flour won't run out.’”

God comes to her through Elijah and invites her trust.

We don't know why—

Maybe it was sheer desperation...

My strong hunch is that it is God's Spirit working inside of her...

After all, earlier God says, "I have commanded a widow to supply you with food"
(cf. 17:9)—

But she says "yes"—

She decides to place her trust in the Lord, God of Israel—

And so enters into a relationship with God.

It's a, "I'm willing to take a step of trust toward the God of Israel" kind of thing.

And God meets that trust with provision.

In God's grace and mercy he supplies her need.

It's a beautiful image of God's grace to us.

God keeps providing and keeps inviting trust.

The oil and the flour don't run out—

She makes bread for Elijah and her household—

But we're not told that Elijah offloads 5-25lbs bags of flour either.

Elijah doesn't have a Costco box with the double thing of olive oil.

God invites her to trust daily.

Everyday she has to go to the cupboard and trust that this God of Israel will provide...

That there will be enough oil and flour in the jars. (Dale Davis)

This is the beginning of a relationship between God and the widow...

An unlikely disciple.

As we'll see next week...

This relationship won't be smooth sailing...

But God has initiated a relationship with this desperate woman...

And she begins the journey of life as God's disciple.

He has come to her...

Moved her to trust by his Spirit...

And offers the daily invitation to keep trusting...keep growing...

"As you see the flour and oil sustaining..."

“Know that I, the Lord God, am sustaining you.”

God is good like that.

He comes to us—

God takes the initiative—

And meets us exactly where we’re at.

Like the widow...

We may not even realize what we need.

Sure, we know we need provision—

We know that life is broken and that we’re desperate—

But we may not realize that God is the answer.

Yet *he* comes to us.

We who are on the outside.

We who worship other gods.

We who live on the wrong side of the tracks.

We who live broken and messy lives...

Lives so bad that we may be ready to give up.

Well, God comes to us...

And he says, “Trust me.”

“Take a step of trust in my direction...”

This is how it goes as Christ’s disciple.

God usually doesn’t plunge us into a mature, Christ-centered relationship...

We cannot handle that...

And most of us don’t want that when we’re just exploring God.

The invitation to you—

If you don’t have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ—

Is to take an initial step of trust.

Maybe it won’t be as big of step that the widow took—

The widow wagered it all on the God of Israel—
She went all in.
Maybe for you it's just being open...
Open to this idea that there is a personal God out there who knows me—
And not only does he know me—
He wants to be in a relationship with me.
Maybe it's taking that step of being honest with yourself...
That you're broken beyond your ability to fix yourself—
That what you've been doing isn't working—
And that you need God's help.
So you take a step of trust toward God...
Admitting your need and asking for his help.

For some of us here though...
We're a little further along in the journey.
And the invitation for us—
The next step now—
Is to entrust more of ourselves to God's care and service.
This widow wagered everything she had on God's reliability...
She withholds nothing from God.
Is God inviting you to wager more on him in a decision or a relationship?
Is God inviting your deeper trust in a certain area of your life?
Is he inviting you into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ...
Where it is Jesus in the driver seat calling the shots...
And you're submitting to God's lead.

That's discipleship—
It's a process—

It's a growing relationship with God through Jesus Christ...

And you start growing from wherever you're at right now.

The relationship has been initiated with Preston through baptism...

The youngest disciple we have right now.

God has put his mark on Preston—

God has come to him in Preston's spiritual need long before Preston realizes it—

Saying, "You are mine."

And for Preston it's going to be invitations to know the Lord:

"Trust me enough to pray to me";

"Trust me that I save you from sin";

"Trust me enough to follow me daily."

Not because Preston or any of us have done anything to deserve or initiate it...

But because God is full of grace...

Because God comes to us in our need.

May God give us his Spirit to respond when God calls...

So that we might fully know his love and grace for us in Jesus Christ.

Amen.