

"The Household of Faith in Distressing Days" 1 Kings 17:2-3, 7-16

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
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Pastor Michael L. McCoy

O LORD, our Creator, Redeemer and Comforter, as we come together to worship You in spirit and in truth, we humbly pray that You may open our hearts to the preaching of Your Word, so that we may repent of our sins, believe in Jesus Christ as our only Savior, and grow in grace and holiness. Hear us for His sake. Amen.

Dear Members of the Household of Faith,

As you know, this day is Rally Sunday, the Sunday that begins the new educational year for Sunday School, various adult Bible classes, and confirmation class. Everyone here understands that it is important for children and adults to continue learning - especially to continue learning what God tell us in the Bible about our human problems and the Lord's great solution in His Son, Jesus. As the people of God congregating in this time and place, the truths that sustain us unto and into eternal Paradise are important and we want to share the Good News of God's love with everyone, especially those of the household of faith.

What is generally true for the members of the congregation is particularly true for those who are parents. Mom and Dad have been given the gift of children and the responsibility to teach them the truth so that, when the children grow up and go off to college or begin a family of their own, they will remain steadfast in the Word and the work of the Lord. That is not easy today. The pressures from those in the world, particularly those who are hostile to the Lord and His Church are getting more vocal and militant.

Parents struggle to walk the fine line of temperance, avoiding the extremes of completely sheltering their children from this harsh, brutal world that uses, misuses, and abuses any who venture forth, and of over-exposing them to all that is evil, vile, dirty, cynical, and immoral. The way to prepare children for life outside the doors of church and home is narrow and difficult in these distressing days.

Distressing and stressing as these days are, dear people, they are not unique in the history of mankind. Nothing has changed From the first step outside the Garden of Eden to this day and until the last Day. Dear members of the Household of Faith here at Our Redeemer, permit me to take you back to some other difficult days - during the time when Elijah was called to be a prophet of the Lord.

The descendants of Abraham and David had steadily wandered away from the Lord as their God and had a succession of loathsome, horrid, wicked kings who did evil in the sight of the Lord and caused the Hebrew people to commit apostasy. The Lord, Who permits sin to punish sin, permitted the

continued decay of spiritual decadence to take place. Evil Ahab became king and he served and worshipped the false God, Baal. Ahab set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he had built in Samaria. King Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.

God calls a prophet - a man named Elijah - to take a message to King Ahab. The message is one of condemning Law, Divine judgment, and awful consequences. Prophet Elijah declares to King Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, Whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at My Word."

So, adding to the bleakness and blight of the spiritual condition of the leadership and the majority of the people, the Lord permitted drought and famine to plague the land and parch the people. Not only did the unbeliever suffer, but so also did the few who had remained faithful to the Lord and who had not bowed the knee to Baal or the other gods of the pagan world. Our theme for this Rally Sunday is

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... *The Household of Faith during Distressing Days* and our text is from 1 Kings 17:

Then the Word of the LORD came to him [Elijah], saying, "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan."

And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. Then the Word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." So she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." And Elijah said to her, "Fear not; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.' " So she went away and did according to the Word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the Word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

As God desires to bring back an apostate generation to Him, He sends them His Word, the consequent Law. Then, probably to the great relief of Elijah, who might not have wanted to stick around very long after delivering God's Word to King Ahab, the prophet is told to leave. *Then the Word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan."* Elijah is commanded to leave the promised land and go to the east, probably east of the Jordan River. The ministry of the Word is taken away from the promised land, a further judgment of God upon the idolatry of the people.

It is as if God said, "I am the Lord and there is no other God besides Me. Yet you have fallen down to other gods, particularly to Baal, which people claim to be the god fertility and the lord of the rain

clouds. I will withhold the rain from the land and you will see just how much rain your Baal - your god of fertility will give you. In addition, I am withdrawing the Ministry of the Word from the land and will leave you isolated from the blessings of My Word."

We might well imagine a situation where a congregation had departed so far from the Word of the Lord that most of the people began to hate the message of sin and grace, repentance and forgiveness that a pastor proclaimed, taught, and professed among them. The consequence might be that the Lord God would call the fearless pastor away, rendering a further judgment upon the impenitent unfaithfulness and wickedness of the congregation. God permits this to bring the people back to Himself. It's called tough love.

In the days of Elijah, the Lord God changes the course of nature and deprives the wicked of their food. God's faithful often suffer the consequences of God's attempt to get the attention of unbelievers. The land in which Elijah lived felt the burden of the hand of God. *And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. Then the Word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there."*

Elijah is commanded to go on a missionary journey and to live right in the middle of the very land from which the Baal worship which was being promoted in Israel had come. He was to seek out a particular widow and live in the Household of faith in that place and time. In the midst of those difficult days, the Glory of the Lord was revealed for the benefit and well-being of the Household of the faithful.

"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." So she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

Faithful Elijah, as the prophet of the Lord and the proclaimer of His Word, did as he had been told, discovering that he would be fed physical food from the hands of a down-trodden, humble widow who was herself at the point of starvation. When she says, *"As the Lord your God lives,"* she reveals that she is not one of the Hebrew people. She was from a pagan nation, and yet the Word of the Lord came to her.

And Elijah said to her, "Fear not." "Woman, though you have lost your husband, though you anticipate the starvation of your only son, though you are dying from hunger yourself, though you are not one of the chosen people in the nation of Israel, though you think that the Lord is not your God, though you come from a pagan people, though you may have followed other gods, though you live in a land where Baal is worshipped, though the Lord God has sent this drought, though He has done this to bring a people and a nation to repentance, though your food is running out, I have Good News for you. 'Fear not.'"

And Elijah said to her, "Fear not; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son."

The messenger of the Lord God said, "Look, though you don't know how things are going to go for the future, though you may weep for a child, though you may be hurting physically, spiritually, mentally, or emotionally, fear not. Go and do as you have been called to do. By the power of God working through the Word, be the best parent you are able to be, speaking words of encouragement, hope, God's love in Christ, and showing the fruits of faith that befits repentance. The Lord is the only God Who does not ask more of you than He promises to give you, and indeed, gives you more."

As the faithful suffer the consequences of life in the same world in a time of general need, the Lord changes the course of nature and provides for the godly. A miracle occurs and the Household of Faith is fed and has enough to sustain life until the rains came once again.

For thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.' " So she went away and did according to the Word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the Word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.

God gave the woman the manna from heaven even while He was withholding food from His unfaithful people in the promised land. A miracle occurs and the Household of Faith, the Family of the Faithful, is fed and has enough to eat from the time of the onset of the great drought in the land of goatheads and devil's club, to the day when parched land is redeemed by the Creator and Re-creator.

Also today the Glory of the Lord is revealed for those of the Household of Faith, especially for us here at Our Redeemer. The account of Elijah, the widow, the unending grain and unstoppable cruse of oil is taught and the doctrines from this Word of God continue to be gleaned and shared.

The Gospel is the flour bin that never runs out. Forgiveness for all sins is without measure and graciously and wonderfully distributed to the Household of Faith in the announcement of the absolution. The Good News is the jar of oil that never fails. Eternal life and salvation are equal opportunity blessings, crossing racial, sexual, ethnic, age, geographic, economic, vocation, and time barriers. The message of Christ crucified for the sins of the world and raised on Easter morning is the exciting dogma that you and I have the honor, privilege, and responsibility to proclaim to one another and especially to teach to the children.

That is why the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in general and Our Redeemer congregation in particular is heavily into teaching. You children and young people have had the scriptures either spoken of to you or placed into your hands. Catechism work begins anew. Confirmation classes and adult Bible classes start again. For you adults, today a new reading schedule for being in the Word begins. Whether you are continuing in the reading program or this is your first time, please be in the Word. *You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.* In addition, you adults and youth are being asked to read sections from a booklet about the teaching or catechesis of doctrine.

As a little boy, there is no doubt that Jesus heard the account of Elijah, the widow, and the ministry of the Word departing one place and entering another. It is an historical account where both Law and Gospel are demonstrated - the Good News when the Lord directed the ministry of the Word to visit a people who were not His people and they became His people - the Law when the Lord took His Word and prophet from the place where He and it were despised and rejected.

That happened in Jesus' day and He said to all who assembled to hear Him on one very stressful occasion:

"Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. "But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

Those who followed Him for the purposes of silencing the Word received their reward and got exactly what they wanted. Despite the stress and the distress, those who follow Him as His disciples feast on the free and abundant feast of the Lord and those who follow Him on His way, wherever it might lead, remained in the Household of Faith, now and forever. Where repentance is called for and where forgiveness is sought, please, dear people, remember and never forget just how much gracious flour and oil there are in the Lord and in His Church. Amen.

In the Name of Jesus and in His Hands, may the promises of God and the blessings of the Word be of benefit to us and to our children. Amen.