

**Third Sunday of Easter – June 9, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

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1 Kings 17:17-24

23) Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!" 24) Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."

Dear friends in Christ:

Investigative news programming is a staple of network TV – there's 60 minutes, 20/20, Prime Time, 48 hours, Nightline and more. This morning I'd like to use a similar format to discuss today's Old Testament lesson from God's Word.

Join me now as we go back in time where we'll investigate:

God's Miracles in Zarephath where

1. God lovingly replaced death with life and
2. God lovingly replaced doubt with faith

God's own word will be our source.

We're here in Jerusalem just outside the palace of King Ahab – a godless ruler – who has no regard for the Lord and his Word. It's been some time since the prophet Elijah proclaimed: **"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."** Reports have just been received that Elijah has been living in the region of Sidon. He's been staying with a widow and her son in the village of Zarephath where the effects of the draught have also been felt.

Our contacts in Zarephath have reported that Elijah came there from the Kerith Ravine, east of Jordan after the brook Kidron ran dry. Sources say that while he was there **ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.**

For some time now he's been in Zarephath, living with a widow and her son whom he met upon his arrival there. Eyewitnesses have described the meeting in this way: (1 Kings 17:10-16) **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 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 cake 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 gives 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 from Zarephath today is that the son of the woman who owned the house where Elijah has been staying had become ill. His condition gradually grew worse and he stopped breathing – In light of the amazing events which we'll uncover later in this report there's no need for us to sugar coat what happened. He died. It's hard to understand how the Lord could allow such a tragedy to befall this home and yet from my perspective as a Christian I can assure you that this situation is not unique. In fact it happens often that the Lord will use the hardships of our lives as an opportunity to display his love, his glory and his power – strengthening our faith and trust in him in the process.

Earlier today our contacts in Zarephath spoke with the widow about her reaction to her son's death. Here's what she told them. **She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"**

She was obviously distraught as she carried her son in her arms. In spite of the fact that she had enjoyed a seemingly endless supply of food in these difficult times she seemed to hold Elijah accountable for the death of her son. It's almost as if she seems to feel that before the prophet arrived in her home that she was insignificant enough to have escaped God's notice.

Apparently once Elijah came she felt her life had come under God's scrutiny and now her son was struck dead as a result. She points the accusing finger at Elijah the man of God.

You know I've got to tell you her reaction isn't all that strange. Just about any pastor will tell you stories about times when they've been visiting with a stranger and having a perfectly wonderful conversation until the other person discovers that they are a pastor. All of a sudden they begin to feel uncomfortable and troubled by sins that never troubled them before. I remember calling one the home of one of my members in another congregation. One of the children answered and when I asked to speak with his father I heard him yell out, "Hey dad, it's the pastor, now what did you do?" Ah, but that's another story.

The fact of the matter at hand is that the widow made a connection between her sin and death. She was aware of the fact that she did not measure up to God's standards – that's more than we could say about wicked King Ahab and his wife Jezebel who live here in the palace in Jerusalem.

I've just learned that we also have available to us an interview with Elijah who reports that he too was grieved by the death of this young man. Elijah reports that he took the widows son from her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord and I quote, **“O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with , by causing her son to die?”**

There's no doubt in Elijah's mind that God has caused this to happen. The Lord's words in Deuteronomy 32:39 are quite clear on this account: **"See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life...** But what's hard for Elijah and us to understand is how we can reconcile this fact with God's love. God has pledged to (Deuteronomy 10:18) **defend the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.** And he's commanded us to do the same. How then can God do such a thing to this widow who took Elijah in when he was a stranger? God seems to be acting contrary to his word. It's clear that Elijah is troubled by this situation. His words express his grief. Hardly the way you'd expect such a prophet to be talking and yet that's the beauty of prayer – we can come to God as we are – not having to pretend to be something we aren't. We can lay our hurts and emotions on the line. In our weakness the Holy Spirit will take our pleas and present our requests to God in ways which are impossible for us to imagine.

Now here's where things get interesting. Elijah explained to our sources that as he was praying he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the Lord, and again I quote: **"O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!"**

In spite of the plain evidence of death that confronted Elijah, he chose to close his eyes and to trust God's Word more than he trusted his own emotions or for that matter more than he trusted his own sight. Elijah dared to believe that the God who works such terrifying judgments in the earth still works in mercy and he's willing to appeal to the Lord on the basis of that mercy.

In answer to Elijah's prayer – the Lord acted in an unprecedented manner. **The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.** This is the first instance in all of Scripture to report to us the miracle of someone who is dead being called back to life and interestingly enough it didn't happen in the land of promise. It happened among foreigners – as a powerful reminder that God's love is not limited to one particular nation and people. And this is no doubt an evidence of the Lord's judgment on his chosen people in Israel who had fallen away from him. God's people had fallen away from the Lord and failed to worship him. But the widow and her son had gladly welcomed the Lord's prophet. They gladly followed the Words of the Lord – relying on his promise to provide them with food.

There's a warning for each one of us not to take the Lord's grace and love for granted. Whenever God's grace ceases to be amazing to us – then we no longer know that grace.

And now it's time for the conclusion of our report from Zerapath. When we last left our account of Elijah he had called upon the Lord and the Lord gave the widow's son his life once

again. Then **Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"**

This wonderful miracle was a testimony that the Lord is true to his promises. The Lord's acts of mercy and the proclamation of his word produced yet another miracle – the miracle of a strengthened faith. **24) Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."**

Earlier in this account we heard the widow lash out against Elijah – as she questioned God's purpose for her and his love for her. Now her doubts had been removed. The Lord of life had touched her life in a miraculous manner not only calling her son back to life but providing her with eternal hope and the confidence that everything Elijah had told her about the Lord was reliable and dependable.

And now let's fast forward a few centuries to the time of Christ and the village of Nazareth where Jesus has just completed a rather pointed address in his hometown synagogue. The crowds are furious and a riot is about to break out – apparently in response to a stinging rebuke which Jesus leveled against his own townsfolk. **"I tell you the truth,"** Jesus said, **"No prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon."**

Our news team in Nazareth has filed this report: (Luke 4:28-30) **All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29) They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. 30) But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.**

That's the news – and now this commentary.

You and I have been privileged to view these accounts from the perspective of the NT. We know that all of Scripture points us to Christ and God's great love. Yet we often fall into the trap of taking that love for granted, of grumbling and complaining about our lot in life and of failing to trust in the Lord. We live in a nation which is becoming more and more Godless and we are not immune to the temptations to reject the truths of scripture and to chase after false gods and worldly pleasures. Diligence and watchfulness are vital at times like this as we seek to remain faithful to the Lord and his promises. Our times are not all that different than Elijah's times. And our God is no different now than he was then. He still calls us to trust on him and to rely upon him. He graciously provides for all of needs of body and soul. The wonderful accounts of his life giving miracles – especially the account of the resurrection of Christ assure us that we too will live for all eternity.

Good day. Amen.