

**Sermon**  
**19 April 2015**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: 1 Kings 17:1-16**

**(Ordination of elder at Polbeth Harwood)**

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What do you do when your burn dries up? When what you thought you needed to survive all of a sudden gets taken away from you?

The prophet Elijah literally knew how that felt!

In Old Testament times the way God communicated with his people was through his prophets.

Time and time again God asked this people to be true to him alone, to not worship the false gods of their neighbours. But to no avail.

Ahab was king of Israel during this time. He got married to Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon, and, together with her, he started to worship the false god Baal. And he expected all of Israel to do the same.

In the passage just before the one we read together this morning, it states that King Ahab *did more to provoke and anger God than all the kings before him.*

And if we look at what some of the other kings did – this makes Ahab very BAD! Like my boys would say if someone in their class got into trouble: Mummy, he wasn't just bad, he was "badder" than bad, he was the "baddest" boy in the whole school!! Well, King Ahab was the "baddest" king in all the history of Israel!

He thought that he didn't need God at all, and to prove the opposite, God decided to take away their lifeline – water.

The minute they repented, God would give it back – which would illustrate to them that it was God who was in charge of everything in the world, and however hard they tried to get help from their new god, Baal wouldn't be able to get them out of this dilemma.

It was Elijah's job to go share this news with the king, and as you can probably imagine, that conversation didn't go down well... The king wanted to kill Elijah, but as we all know very well, God takes care of his people, so God told him where he should go hide – in Kerith.

Literally Kerith means "cutting"/ "separation", which is exactly what Elijah did. He separated himself from Israel to go hide under God's protection.

This couldn't have been easy for Elijah, but he did as he was asked, and God provided all his needs – he could drink water from the burn, and ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and evening.

I find this quite interesting – God provided his needs in a surprising way. Meals on wings! But ravens were unlikely birds to be used for something like this, because the nature of ravens is rather to eat the food

themselves; they don't take good care of their young, and on top of all this, they were regarded as unclean birds in the law of God.

I think God was showing Elijah that he can use whatever means he wants to – even the least likely bird suitable for this special task, humanly speaking, can be utilised by God to take care of his children.

So although this was probably not a very easy chapter in Elijah's life – he was comfortable, all his needs were provided for. Until...the burn dried up.

Elijah probably started to panic when this happened, but by now he must have known that God would provide. After all, he was busy doing exactly what God had asked him to do. And how right he was – just at that point God told him to go to Zarephath of Sidon.

An unlikely place - Birth town of Queen Jezebel - and probably the very last place he would choose to hide from the king; outside the borders of Israel; a long and difficult journey to get there... And to top it all, Zarephath means "smelting furnace". So literally *out of the frying pan and into the fire!* But nobody's ever said that God's plans will make sense to us.

In this village, Elijah was to be taken care of by a *widow*. A widow in those days was somebody who needed to be taken care of; widows were never in a position to take care of others. A woman's only means of income was through her husband, which of course a widow didn't have anymore. And *this* widow had a young son she needed to take care of as well...

I don't think anybody would have gone to her for help even as a last resort. But probably God planned it like this, so that Elijah (and all of us today), could realise that the help wasn't coming from her, but from God himself. God just used her as an instrument.

And what an instrument she was! This poor woman was at the end of her tether. Her burn has dried up as well, so to speak. She was gathering wood for what she thought was the very last fire she would make to prepare a meal on – her and her son's last meal together before they die of hunger.

And then this strange man comes up to her and asks her to make *him* something to eat *first*, before she feeds herself and her son!! She would be able to see by his clothing and hear through his accent that he belonged to Israel, that he belonged to the God everybody's heard of, and she obeyed.

And because she was obedient to God, God provided in her needs. *God changed the ending of her story.* Every single day, up until the very day the drought was over, God gave her just enough for her, her son and Elijah to live by. Not more, but not less either. The little flour and oil she had never ran out.

By selflessly helping somebody else, she helped herself and her son in a way that she would never even have imagined possible. And through this, God showed not only his own people, but all those around them as well, that he was in charge of the whole world, of life everywhere.

So – what do you do when your burn dries up?

What do *you* do when *your* burn dries up?

When something happens that changes your comfortable way of living into a struggle?

When you lose your job, your health, your partner?

When nothing makes sense to you anymore?

When you have more questions than answers;

when it feels as if there is nothing left for you other than just wait to die?

I don't know what you do when you feel like that, but I do know what you *should* do. Take your eyes away from your problems and focus them on God.

He will not desert you. His answer might come in a very unlikely way – on the wings of a raven; he might send you on a long journey to an unexpected place, where a very unlikely person might take you under her wing... God does things that don't make sense to us at all, but we are not asked to understand God's demands, we are asked to obey them. That's what faith is...

One thing we should never forget, is that when our burn dries up, it might just be because God has a bigger miracle in store for us!

So instead of trying to figure out *why* things happen to us, I think we should just look to God and obey what he expects us to do. Even if it

doesn't make sense to *us* on any level, he always knows what he is doing.

Even if it is just to teach us that the ending we were so sure of, was not the ending to our stories at all.

So whether you are Elijah in this story, the raven, the widow, or her son, no matter whether you are the one taking care of others at the moment or the one being taken care of, no matter whether you are the obvious person in the obvious place to do something or the most unlikely person in the most unlikely place – God wants to use you.

Just say yes, and serving God in this way might turn out to be the best thing you've ever chosen to do.

May God bless you (in serving him in this congregation, ....., and all of you,) wherever you go and whatever you do.

Don't see it as the end of your story when your burn dries up, see it as the beginning of an exciting new chapter with God in the lead.

Amen