

7 November 2021

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Nanda Groenewald

Reading: 1 Kings 17:8-16

Faith doesn't make *sense*... It makes miracles. If you believe in God, the impossible becomes possible.

Now – the attentive among you might have realised that the story the kids watched and the one we read from the Bible is not one and the same. It's 2 different widows, 2 different prophets – but the principle, the moral of the story, is exactly the same – a little oil can go a long way if you have faith.

This story reminds me of when I was studying for my final exams in high school. When it was time to go to church on a Sunday, and I was panicking that I wouldn't have enough time to get through all my work if I went to church, my dad always said: "If you go to church, God will stretch the hours." And you know – every Sunday during exam time was exactly as long as the other days, but although I spent less time behind my books, I still got everything done.

God gives us what we need. As long as we have faith. Even though faith doesn't always make sense!

**

To put the story we read together in context, let's take a quick look at the life of Elijah, the prophet of God.

His *job* was to speak to the people on behalf of God, and his *name* means, “The Lord is my God.”

This was an interesting time in the life of God’s people. It was the time of the greatest spiritual crisis Israel had seen for generations.

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel had led the people into worship of Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility and rain. In fact, we read in the Bible that Ahab did more to provoke and anger the Lord than *all* the kings of Israel before him.

Can you imagine that? Being the worst and most wicked king Israel’s ever had? Because of Ahab, Israel was about to experience God’s judgment.

Elijah’s ministry started when God asked him to confront King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. He had to announce to them that there would be no more rain or dew until God decided there would be.

Now *that* was quite an announcement! I know that if you live in a place like Scotland, where it rains all the time, it’s difficult to imagine that rain is actually a blessing!

They could not grow crops, and therefore eat, without rain. And’s that’s why Baal – the god of rain and fertility – had such appeal to God’s people.

So God decided to render judgment upon Israel by showing them *who* was in charge of the rain.

Elijah made the bold announcement. As the rain stopped, and the drought began, he became public enemy #1: the drought was blamed on *him*. That must have been *some* beginning to his ministry! *Sometimes faith doesn't make sense.*

Being used by God isn't always easy, and it's most certainly not always glorious... *What is God using you for at the moment? Is it harder than you thought it would be to be obedient to God, to stand up for what is right?*

Poor Elijah's first calling was turning off the water – and therefore cutting off the life – of his own people...

But God was for him. He moved him – not only spiritually, but physically too. God told him to go to a specific burn, where he could drink the water, and be fed by ravens. This place was also *out* of the jurisdiction of Ahab. So he was safe.

Elijah had a difficult job to do, but, God was with him every step of the way.

He went to the burn and, sure enough, there was water and food every day. God never gave him more than he needed, but also never any less.

What is your need right now? Where is your life on the brink of shortage, facing hunger? What lack is staring you in the face? And where is the burn you go to? To where, to whom, to what is God sending you so He can feed and water your soul?

We need to learn to depend upon God. If Elijah didn't go to the burn, he wouldn't have had food and water. He had to trust God to provide. And He did!

But back to the story. It's tough to be right! Elijah told Ahab there would be no rain or dew... And there was no rain or dew. Elijah knew this very well, because every day the burn dried up a little more – until one day it was gone.

He knew that day would come – but still it shook him.

*We're never fully ready when a crisis arrives at our doorstep, are we?
Even when we can see it coming.*

Sometimes faith just doesn't make sense.

But God was prepared again. He told Elijah what to do and where to go.

God's word comes at the right time.

He doesn't tell us what to do before we need to know it. So please don't ever worry or panic about some crisis that may come to your doorstep sometime in the future; when it arrives, so will God.

God told Elijah that he had to go and live in a village near the city of Sidon. And that there would be a widow there who would feed him.

God's way doesn't always appear logical... See, this village was at the centre of the area where the worship of Baal started. The people who

lived there were the ones responsible for God's judgment in the first place. And they had no water or food. Why in the world did God send him there? And what was worse, there was a King living there – named Ethbaal – who was the father of the wicked Queen Jezebel.

So God was telling Elijah to go from the security of a place where he at least had food and was safe, to a place of extreme drought and famine right into the jurisdiction of Ahab again.

And that's not all! God said He had talked to a widow to help him. Can you imagine that? A widow – someone, who in Biblical times, had no social or economic standing, no husband, no relationship with her father's family, no job, no means of support. *She* was assigned to help him.

And, to top it off, the name of the village, Zarephath, literally means, "A smelting furnace, a place of refining". Now that didn't sound like much fun! *Sometimes faith doesn't make sense.*

It must have been a challenge to trust God on this one, because it looked like God's solution for his problems was only going to make things worse!

But sometimes God calls us to more than a place, he calls us to an attitude, an outlook on life. If what God expects us to do doesn't make any sense, all we can do is to trust him.

Elijah's journey was tough. We're talking here about 90-100 miles – on foot – through drought-stricken land.

Obedience can be painful. There are no five- or ten-year plans in the Bible. God simply asks His people to follow Him, and then He points out the next step. Obedience comes one step at a time, one day at a time. We can never know the future significance of our current obedience to God. If God is asking you, right now, for obedience in some area of your life, just do it. God knows why He needs it... So just do it.

When Elijah arrived in the village, there, at the gate of the city was the widow, gathering up sticks. This wasn't a coincidence; it was a God-thing!

So he asked her for a cup of water. And as she left to get it, he added, "Bring me a bite of bread too!"

That stopped her in her tracks. She turned to him and said, "I swear by the Lord your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die."

Elijah knew that he should have expected that. After all, it had been his prediction that there would be a drought. He was asking her for what she did not have. *Faith sometimes doesn't make sense.*

God often demands things from us what we think we do not have, but He will never ask anything from us that he won't also give us.

God knew the widow could provide for Elijah; and by this time, Elijah knew she could too; *she* just needed to know that.

What is God asking from you right now? And what is your response?

“God, I have nothing to give. I’m barely surviving now? I can’t give time I don’t have? I can’t teach when I don’t have much education in the Bible myself! I don’t spend enough time with my family – how can I do more in the church? I have nothing left to give. What is it you really want from me?” If that’s maybe the way you feel, remember the rest of the story.

Elijah told the widow to not be afraid. To go ahead and cook that ‘last meal,’ but to bake him a little loaf of bread first. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘There will always be plenty of flour and oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops grow again!’”

God is bigger than our need. God is bigger than our desires, our plans, our lack of knowledge, our lack of time or money; bigger than our circumstances and our limitations. So don’t ever be afraid, just work with God. There is blessing in obedience.

The woman accepted the challenge; and she, her son, and Elijah continued to eat from the ongoing fresh supply of flour and oil day by day. No matter how much they used, there was always some left – just as God had told them there would be!

Can you imagine how this story would have turned out if Elijah, or the widow, didn’t trust God?

None of what was happening to them made any sense. Yet, they trusted, and just look at the outcome. This story teaches us the God is present in our weakness.

**

I know that most of us are concerned about the future; in fact, we're worried about getting by in the present – sort of like the widow in our story.

She, too, was concerned. One meal away from death, in fact.

God may not always give you what you want, but he will always provide what you need.

I'm quite sure neither Elijah nor the widow wanted to be in the position they were in, but with the help of God they got through it.

And I'm pretty sure none of us wanted to be in the position we are in at the moment either – having to deal with Covid19, and all the consequences of lockdown; the climate crisis; not even to mention all the personal issues everyone is struggling with.

But you know, when your faith doesn't make sense, you are in the perfect place to learn how great the blessings of God are.

So I want to ask you this morning: "How is your faith?" The only way to have a good life, despite your circumstances, is to put God first.

This wonderful widow refused to be had by the little she had; you should too. How big is God for you? How much do you trust Him? How much are you willing to endure through obeying Him?

Give God your time and He will give you more time than you ever thought you had.

Give God your limited abilities, knowledge, and skills and watch Him spread plentiful blessings through them.

Give God your life, and experience His abundance.

Victory comes from letting God have it all. That's why God will ask us over and over again to give it all to Him, even when we think we have nothing to give.

We are free to refuse, of course – but then we will run out of oil and flour. Or, we can release it all to Him, and we will never lack anything. The choice is ours.

I would like to leave you now with the words I started this sermon with: Faith doesn't make *sense*... It makes miracles. If you believe in God, the impossible becomes possible.

Amen