

8-6-2023 Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
Text: 1 Kings 17:1-6

Pastor Priewe

Theme: The Christian Trusts God to Provide

- 1) When he asks you to bear the cross
- 2) When things are getting dicey
- 3) Because he has given you promises to rely on

In the name of God, the one who opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing. Let me offer you a job description and let's see if you're looking for a change. At the top of the list of duties, you would be a spokesman who's required to show up in-person and deliver unwelcome proclamations to the most powerful authority in your country, who also happens to be the most wicked ruler who's ever lived. You'd have to be willing to live in isolation, under the threat of death from rulers you just ticked off. You've got to have thick skin because everybody will likely blame you for the economic disaster and terrible living conditions that've fallen upon your country.

For all this high stress work, here's the compensation package. Hazard pay includes two square meals a day of bread and meat, brought to you by ravens. Housing will be available in the great outdoors, though it's not much, it's got waterfront views—a ravine with a nice brook running through it. Enjoy it while it lasts, and you'll have plenty of quiet time to yourself to think and gather fire wood or something. Any takers so far? Anybody looking to mix it up? Need a change of scenery? No? I guess I'm not surprised. It's a lot to ask for seemingly so little reward. Oh, but I forgot the most important part of the compensation package- the benefits. The LORD, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the maker of heaven and earth will be your God. He will stand by your side and uphold you with his mighty right hand and his word to you will never fail. While you may live a lowly life here and now, he has laid in store for you a seat at his banquet table in the kingdom of heaven that will last forever.

Whose job description are we talking about? The prophet Elijah, the man whose very name was a reminder of the most important duty and the most important benefit of his job. The name Elijah means, **“The LORD is my God.”** Elijah's life was going to demonstrate that truth not just in empty words, but with actions, trials, and deliverance. Elijah bursts onto the scene with hardly any introduction. At God's direction we find him making this proclamation to King Ahab, the king of the northern tribes of Israel. **“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.” (1 Kings 17:1)

Now what’s the reason for this? Why would the God who opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing be withholding rain from his own chosen nation? Because things had gotten ugly in Israel, really ugly. The kingdom that had risen to its height of glory under King David and Solomon, the wisest man on earth we talked about last week, had actually been sent down the wrong path later on by that same wise Solomon because he took so many wives who brought the worship of their false gods into the land of Israel. The kingdom was split between Solomon’s wicked son Rehoboam and another wicked guy named Jeroboam. Jeroboam got the northern ten tribes which were still called Israel (or sometimes Samaria), while Rehoboam got the other two tribes of Judah. In the north, Jeroboam set up two golden calves at Bethel and Dan for the people to worship God there on the high places. Apparently, golden calves are a bad idea every time someone tries them, so things only went further down the slippery slope of idolatry from there.

Now Ahab enters the picture as the king of the northern tribes of Israel about 50 years after Solomon. This is the description God gives of him, one I don’t think you want on your tombstone. **“Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.”** (1 Kings 16:30-33). Basically, he’s the doozy of wicked kings, egged on by his heathen First Lady Jezebel, whose name becomes God’s nickname for evil. And... they worship Baal.

Now here’s the thing about Baal and the rain. Baal might seem like some ancient and irrelevant false god of rain, but he’s really not that much different than some classic American idols. In Canaanite religion, Baal was basically the god of two vices, immoral sex and materialism. Baal was thought to be the god who made the ground fertile and the harvests good and the people prosperous, all by sending rain. And the way the people would worship Baal and entreat him to bless them with rain was to engage in immoral sex with shrine prostitutes in his temple to stimulate Baal to action.

So Elijah, whose name means, “My God is the LORD”, is the one who has been given the job to walk into the presence of Ahab, the most wicked king yet to come, and proclaim a drought in all the land of Israel. Elijah’s proclamation is really like the true God throwing down the gauntlet against Baal, the false God of rain and declaring him incapable of providing a single drop of rain or dew. Not one drop would come in Israel until the true God said so through Elijah.

Now in the aftermath of that proclamation, Elijah was going to be faced with the test of faith that is our theme today—*The Christian trusts God to provide*. Elijah’s words were not going to affect Ahab and Jezebel alone, but the whole land which was about to face drought and famine and a shortage of food and water. On top of it, Elijah was now going to be public enemy #1 in the eyes of his wicked royal tag team and he was going to have to go into God’s witness protection program in the Kerith Ravine to stay alive.

Already here in the Old Testament, we could say that God was calling Elijah to **bear the cross**—to endure hardship in his life as a believer, and especially hardship caused by being faithful to the true God. Part of that cross was confronting Ahab with God’s proclamation in the first place, but the second part of the cross would be to trust God to provide for him afterward while he was an outcast and there was no rain or food. It rings true for us as well. *The Christian must trust God to provide 1) when he asks you to bear the cross.*

The God of Israel would prove himself faithful as he always does. **“The word of the LORD came to Elijah: ‘Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there.’”** (1 Kings 17:3). On this occasion God was going to use something natural and supernatural, a seasonal brook to drink from and a miraculous pack of ravens, which are scavenger birds whose instinct is to eat whatever dead things they find, not carry bread and meat twice a day to hiding prophets. But this is the setup God told Elijah to rely on.

Then comes a verse jam packed with application. Are you ready for it? Here it is. **“So Elijah did what the LORD had told him.”** (1 Kings 17:5) Even when it was the Lord telling him something good, about how he would provide for him, think of all the objections that might spring to life in his mind or your mind that need to be silenced. *“Why is God doing this to me? There is no way ravens are going to feed me, I will starve! How long is this brook going to last anyway? I will die of thirst!”* Embedded in that little sentence, **“Elijah did what the Lord told him,”** is a war against the devil who will not rest until he has convinced us that God is going to

abandon us and that we need to abandon God's will first. That little sentence involves the crucifying of our flesh that cries out, "*I don't trust that God will be faithful to his promise when things are getting dicey.*" That one short, sweet sentence demands taking captive our every thought and making it obedient to God. *The Christian trusts God to provide 2) even when things are getting dicey.*

On this occasion, we see Elijah do what the Lord told him to do. God gave him a promise to rely on and he trusted the promise. The ravens fed him and he drank the brook until it went dry and then God picked a new way to provide for his prophet. He sent him to a widow in Zarephath with a little jar of flour and oil that never ran out. That's all part of a sermon for another time. The point is that Elijah trusted God to provide *because God had given him promises to rely on.*

Now in all of that, our focus must be on the God *who provides what he promises.* Elijah is the one in this particular story, but he's simply a sinner-saint just like any one of us. There were other times when Elijah's faith didn't shine so brightly. You'll see a text like that next week where he gets depressed and angry at God, even to the point of wanting to die. And that all happened when the pain of bearing the cross and the diceyness of this world caused him to lose sight of the promises of God.

So it's a good thing that Elijah is not the Savior of this text and that the whole point of this message isn't, "*Just be like Elijah who had great faith sometimes.*" No, Elijah was one in a long line of prophets who trusted God to provide not only for our earthly needs but more importantly for the salvation of Israel, of those who believe his promises. Though we don't really have recorded a specific prophecy that Elijah made about the Christ, we do know that John the Baptist, the one who prepared the way for Christ, was called the second Elijah. The second Elijah must have been something like the first, not just in appearance but in their task of preparing the hearts of Israel for the coming salvation of God. And remember who shows up on the Mount of Transfiguration pointing at the Son of Man as reveals his glory? Oh yeah, Moses and Elijah!

You know, there's one another fascinating place we hear Elijah's name come up in the New Testament. It's when Jesus is hanging on the cross. His perfect trust in his Father's will and his obedience in bearing the cross has brought him to this moment. And then he cries out the words we still read in Aramaic on Good Friday, "**Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?**" (Matthew 27:46)

And what did some think? **“He’s calling Elijah”** (47). No, he wasn’t calling Elijah. He was calling out the meaning of the name. **“My God, My God,”** followed by a question only he had the right to ask because he was innocent. **“Why have you forsaken me?”**

The reason the Father turned his face away from his innocent Son was because he was being faithful to the promises made for us long ago, like the one to Abraham on the mountain where he called him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The Lord gave a ram in Isaac’s place and it was said, **“On the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided.”** The “it” was a substitute. God was providing for each of us the substitute, the lamb who takes away the sin of the world, the message of the second Elijah! Since he has given us his Son, the most costly gift he could give, he will most certainly also provide us with everything we need. ***So the Christian trusts God to provide 3) because he has given us promises to rely on.***

For the majority of my life, God has poured out so many physical blessings I tend to neglect even thinking about them. But there was about one month, the hardest month of my life, that reminds me to be thankful. It was a month where my wife and I felt like we were being fed by the ravens. We were living in Ronald McDonald house next to Children’s Hospital in Milwaukee while our daughter Josie was in the NICU after her birth. Twice a day, between trips into the hospital, I would go out and “hunter-gather” as we called it. It was pretty rigorous. That meant I would walk down the hallway to the kitchen where I would open the fridge and every day there was fresh food, meals from local businesses, a carrots and celery cut by volunteers, not even to mention the “Door Dash” gift cards that would show up in the mail from our family here at Mount Olive. Life was dicey. We had been called to bear a cross, and as we did, we ate and we drank and were nourished by God’s promises to provide for us. God has promised, dear Christian, trust him to provide. Amen.