

Nov 1 2020 ... START HERE ...



Prepare for our time together from afar

- Find a quiet and comfortable space
- Turn on some soothing instrumental music, maybe with headphones
- Consider the stillness of a lit candle
- Take 3 deep breaths and calm your mind



Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper

God, guide me through the day
God remind me of Christ's presence
Under me, over me
On my right and on my left
God, breathe in and through me

May it be so.

TIME FOR THE ANCIENT STORY

Read silently or aloud – let these ancient words tap into your imagination.

Here's the backstory for today's story :

David, the king from last week, has long since passed. The kingdom has split. Many kings of the northern half have chosen other gods to worship, including the current king, Ahab. Elijah, a prophet of God, has begun to speak out on God's behalf – attempting to get the attention of the king and his elite leaders. Ahab has too much of his own power to just switch out gods, so he isn't too friendly with Elijah.

Now for the ancient story ...

Elijah from Tishbe, who was one of the settlers in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As surely as the LORD lives, Israel's God, the one I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain these years unless I say so."

Then the LORD's word came to Elijah: Go from here and turn east. Hide by the Cherith Brook that faces the Jordan River. You can drink from the brook. I have also ordered the ravens to provide for you there. Elijah went and did just what the LORD said. He stayed by the Cherith Brook that faced the Jordan River. The ravens brought bread and meat in the mornings and evenings. He drank from the Cherith Brook. After a while the brook dried up because there was no rain in the land.

The LORD's word came to Elijah: Get up and go to Zarephath near Sidon and stay there. I have ordered a widow there to take care of you. Elijah left and went to Zarephath. As he came to the town gate, he saw a widow collecting sticks. He called out to her, "Please get a little water for me in this cup so I can drink." She went to get some water. He then said to her, "Please get me a piece of bread."

"As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any food; only a handful of flour in a jar and a bit of oil in a bottle. Look at me. I'm collecting two sticks so that I can make some food for myself and my son. We'll eat the last of the food and then die."

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go and do what you said. Only make a little loaf of bread for me first. Then bring it to me. You can make something for yourself and your son after that. This is what Israel's God, the LORD, says: The jar of flour won't decrease and the bottle of oil won't run out until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth." The widow went and did what Elijah said. So the widow, Elijah, and the widow's household ate for many days. The jar of flour didn't decrease nor did the bottle of oil run out, just as the LORD spoke through Elijah.

Elijah is known as one of the Great Prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. Keep reading through 2 Kings 3 to hear some incredible tales!

- 1 Kings 17:1-16 CEB

SO WHAT NOW?

Read silently or aloud – some thoughts on this story

Fifty-seven. 57. Three less than 60 and seven more than 50.

That's how many homeless students attend the high school where I teach.

Imagine – being underage, on your own, unable to make enough money to rent a tiny apartment (not that there **are** any of those in my school district), trying to stay in school and graduate, and maybe the only meals you get are the free ones provided by the school.

And – what about how becoming homeless happened? Are parents or loved ones still in the picture? What about siblings? Transportation? Healthcare? Clothing – especially for the highland winters here? And then the trauma of becoming homeless – how are these students expected to care for themselves mentally?

I am sure that I have taught homeless students before, I just didn't know I was. The first thing that hits me with this trouble in the life of our district (and these students) is to clean out my closets and have extra food handy in my classroom.

But does that really fix the problem or does that just get them to the next day, maybe?

And who **is** supposed to prevent this from happening? The adults in their lives? Or the “system” or the church or the town or the school? What if the whole community is struggling to just live?

These questions rolled around in my mind as I identified with the widow of Zarepheth in today's story. What happened to her husband and when? Where are the other family members that could care for her? Technically, her son would be at the top of the list of males to take the woman in, but he seems too young to do so. And with a drought going on – did the woman's husband's family abandon her and move somewhere else? She is not Israelite (she is from Phoenicia) so who knows?

Because in a land where agriculture was the main way to care for your family, and in the same land, rain only came once a year, a drought meant death. So, of course, you would move if you could.

All we know from the story, is somehow this unnamed woman at least had a space to call home and a hearth on which to build a fire and cook. But that's it. We find her gathering wood to build the last fire, bake the last little loaf of bread from the last handful of flour and bit of oil she has – and wait for death.

That's pretty depressing. It seems there was nothing else there for her – no United Way, no Goodwill, no Social Security, no homeless shelter, no food pantry, no safety net. And – it seems everyone is suffering from the drought, so I'm guessing people were out for themselves and had no time or compassion for a widow and her son – they could have been too busy trying to survive themselves.

Then, here comes Elijah – himself homeless yet with a mission. God told him to come to Zarephath, which is way north of where the Israelites were, and a widow there would care for him.

Uh – God, you know widows are supposed to be cared *for* – You've said it over and over again in the scriptures! I wonder if Elijah was a bit stumped by this direction, but off he went and he meets the widow at the gate of the city.

Elijah's conversation with the widow put me off at first – I wanted to yell at him, who do you think you are talking to a woman like that? But I live in 2020 and this probably happened almost 3000 years ago on the other side of the earth. Maybe Elijah's request for water and bread was a way of “testing” the woman to see if she was the widow God told him would care for him?

How else would he figure it out?

I also wonder, she put up a bit of a fight but not much. Perhaps she was so tired of trying to live that she didn't have the energy to be hospitable or to tell Elijah no. Perhaps she was really ready to die and couldn't care less if Elijah came along for the ride.

When folks are suffering and suffering badly, sometimes they get to that point. The big word for that feeling of not caring any more is apathy. I've been there and apathy is awful.

Thankfully, for Elijah, the widow did what he asked and Elijah speaks a promise that God fulfills immediately.

Can you imagine a jar of flour and a jar of oil never emptying? Can you imagine having enough? Enough food? Enough wages to buy what you need? Enough healthcare to be healthy? Enough resources to live a good life of love and hope and joy?

Can you imagine having enough and being able to share with a widow and her son?

What if the rich folks in my town took 10% of their wealth and provided housing, food, clothing, healthcare and transportation for the 57 homeless students at my school - *no questions asked?*

Occasionally someone rich and famous will do that - for one person or one family. But for local folks to step up to the plate and help out folks in their own community like this - *no questions asked* - rarely happens.

Many people in the United States have much more than they will ever need. And many are so needy they can't live.

Are we willing to be with the needy and provide for them - in ways that they can truly live?

CHAT WITH GOD TIME

Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper.

Haven't we suffered enough, O God?
Like the widow – many have lost protection
Like the son – many have lost loved ones
Like the prophet – many have lost homes

How long will we suffer, O God?
Trying to survive on a handful of flour
While others grow fat from oppressing
Gathering ourselves for the end

How do we trust your direction, O God?
When strange men tell us what to do
When we have nothing left to give
When your promises seem absurd

How can we live again, O God?
Droughts of injustice surround us
Yet your life-giving jars remain full
Fill us until the rains of new birth arrive

May it be so

LET YOUR SOUL RESPOND

As you wish, choose a theme, and participate in a response to the story and the message.



LOOK

Practice awareness

- Who around you is living rough – no job, no healthcare?
- Who around you is able to help?

What does being with folks in tough situations feel like?



ASK

Practice reflection

- What could change to make rough lives easier?
- What part could you play in changing someone's rough time?

What obstacles keep you from helping out?



MOVE

Practice wisdom

- What organizations could help you help others?
- Who could you learn from?

What does working together to make life better look like?

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
- choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
- write something that reflects your thoughts
- what else can you imagine?

LET YOUR MIND RESPOND

Choose a “thought & question” pair to think about. You can do one or as many as you’d like.

1. Elijah stands in direct opposition to Ahab (the king of Israel) at the risk of his life. *What would you stand up to right now – if you had control of TikTok or YouTube?*
2. God sends Elijah to a widow for care. *Who in your life takes care of everyone – especially folks who have very little?*
3. Elijah causes a miracle to happen with the flour and oil. *What is our responsibility to care for folks who cannot care for themselves, folks whom the systems let fall through the cracks, or folks who are rejected by society?*

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
- choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
- write something that reflects your thoughts
- what else can you imagine?

LET YOUR BODY RESPOND

What will you do with this experience?

Choose an action (or more) to act on what you've learned ...

- Find an organization or group of people who help others and work with them
- Draw an image of a life free from worry – plenty of food, water, shelter, and care
- Visit a person you know in a rough patch – listen to their stories
- Play a song that helps you feel strong enough to help others
- Create a homeless care bag (Google it) you can give away when you see someone begging
- Write a politician – standing for what you believe is right for all people

Options to share your responses:
(see end of packet for online options)

- create a piece of art representing your thoughts
- choose a song or playlist that shares your thoughts
- write something that reflects your thoughts
- what else can you imagine?

END HERE ...



Prepare for our return to our daily lives

- Take 3 deep breaths and calm your mind
- Consider the stillness of a lit candle



Pray as you are comfortable – read silently, say out loud, whisper

God, guide me through the day
God remind me of Christ's presence
Under me, over me
On my right and on my left
God, breathe in and through me

May it be so.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK! PASTOR CRISTINE

ONLINE RESPONSE OPTIONS

How will you share this experience with our youth group?

If you would like to share your responses online with our youth and leaders, make sure you are part of our MVCC Youth Google Group.

Email Pastor Cristine at youth@montevista.org for more information.