

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Carrie Gleeson
Elijah and the Widow | 1 Kings 17**

Good morning! My name is Carrie Gleeson and I work with our students here at CPC. We are so happy that you're worshipping with us this morning!

What are you hungry for? What do you hunger for? John started last week—our first weekend of Lent—with that question. What do you hunger for? He reminded us that Lent doesn't have to be this legalistic ritual; that we don't have to give something up solely to be religious, but that we can partner with God and participate in what He's doing. He reminded us that during Lent we are invited to connect with Him in a deeper way and experience Him in a new way, training ourselves to go to Him first. Sometimes this means that during Lent that we add something; we feast. I've added prayer before during Lent, added a devotional, a piece of Scripture, but sometimes it means that we fast from something. We say no to something. We press pause, we resist something so that we can go to God first. We choose to trust God instead of that thing that we really like because it allows us to see who He is. And so often when God talks about meals in the Bible, whether it's feasts or it's minor crumbs left of a meal, God uses it to show us what we really need. He uses it to speak to our soul, not just to talk about actual food. So, what are you hungry for? The question I want to follow up with this week is this: where do you go to be fed? What are you hungry for and where do you go to be fed?

Let's pray as we dive into Scripture.

Jesus, we give You this time and this space. We ask that You would open our ears, and our eyes, and our hearts to see You, to hear from You, to be filled by You. We ask Lord, that You would be the loudest voice. That You would speak through Your Word to us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

I started in drama and theatre when I was in fourth grade, but I was one of those little girls who played pretend from the time I could walk. I loved playing pretend. Now, I love movies and I love TV. My mother is a journalist, my grandmother was an English professor, and my sister was an English teacher, so stories run in my blood—wanting to know stories and wanting to teach stories. Stories are just a part of us, and I think—I haven't checked this with God yet—but I think when I get to heaven, He's going to let me see some of the biblical stories lived out on a stage or on a screen, because I want to see how people actually encountered Jesus. I want to see it played out; I want to see how people encountered God. I want to see the Israelites crossing the Red Sea when it was split on two sides; I want to see this played out. One of the stories that I want to see played out is what we're going to look at this morning. It's a little bit more of an obscure chapter in Scripture because the chapters that come after it are full of big miracles, so a lot of times those chapters get center stage, but we're going to look at 1 Kings 17 if you want to turn to it in one of the pew Bibles. Here we're introduced to Elijah the prophet.

Now, a lot of us who have spent some time in church have heard of this man named Elijah before, but we never hear necessarily how he's introduced to us. Elijah literally just pops into the picture. There's no buildup of him in previous chapters, there's no mention of him, he just comes on the scene and this is how he's introduced.

1 Now Elijah who was from Tishbite, the Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, the God I serve, there will be no dew or rain during the next few years till I give the word." [1 Kings 17:1]

That's quite a way to come on the scene. He goes to the king, the king of a divided Israel—Israel and Judah—and he tells King Ahab . . . *um, hi, there's not going to be any rain until I say so.* There's none of this, *Hi King Ahab, my name's Elijah. I would love to talk to you, sit down for coffee if you have a chance. Got a message from God to give to you.* No, he just says there will be no dew or rain until I say so. That's it. You see, King Ahab and the Canaanite people worshiped the god of Baal, and the god of Baal was the god of fertility. He was believed to provide blessing on the land and to the people, and they believed this god sent the rains to produce crops so they could harvest them. That's what they believed the god of Baal did, and so Elijah went to the king and he said, "It's not going to rain until I say so because the living God, the God of Israel, is going to withhold that rain." The people in this community followed idols. They were hungry for sustenance and believed that Baal would provide for them, and so Elijah was called to bring them this message, and sometimes when I read Scripture I tend to think, *God sure talks a lot about idols in the Old Testament.* There's a lot of discussion of idols in the Old Testament. This is one of those things that these people back then just couldn't figure out; they were a little nuts. They would constantly go to God, then walk away from God, then go back to God. They set up statues, they worshiped false gods, they gathered together to offer sacrifices to their idol gods, they built shrines, they did whatever it took to be accepted by the gods, and I have a feeling we can understand what that means.

This isn't just an ancient world problem, this isn't just a Canaanite problem, this is an all of us problem. We all depend on other things to provide sustenance for us. We all rely on other things to fill us, don't we? We rely on other things to give us worth, to give us value, to meet the needs of what we hunger for, and the interesting thing is that all of these things in and of themselves aren't necessarily bad, it's what we do with them and how we respond to them that makes it bad. Money in and of itself isn't bad until we give it power and control. Food is not bad until we use it to satisfy the longings of our soul. Sex is not wrong until we use it to exploit. Performing well on a test, or at work, or in a sport—that's not wrong until it becomes our identity. Relationships are positive until we can't live without them. Where do you go to be fed?

Elijah was sent to this area to show them that Baal was not the living god. He was not the provider of their sustenance, he was not the place that they should be running to be

fed, so Elijah said to them, “It’s not going to rain until I say so.” The Lord meets him there and in verse 3 says:

³“Go to the east and hide by Kerith Brook, near where it enters the Jordan River. ⁴ Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food.” ⁵ So Elijah did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. ⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. ⁷ But after a while the brook dried up, for there was no rainfall anywhere in the land. [1 Kings 17:3-7]

Elijah brought this message to King Ahab and afterwards he didn’t get to just go home to his nice, comfortable, warm bed. Elijah had to be in it with the Canaanite people, with King Ahab and the community, which means that God then needed to provide for Elijah. So, God used the natural settings that were around Elijah to provide for his very real physical hunger. God can use the natural to provide for us. Elijah didn’t just stay there for a little while, though. It wasn’t just a week and then the brook dried up. It was years that Elijah had to stay by this brook to get water from it and to get food from the ravens, but because it was natural and there was no rain, the brook dried up. So what did Elijah do? God had been using this natural source to feed him—using it as a vehicle to provide for him, but then it was gone, and the Lord said to Elijah,

⁹“Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. I have instructed a widow there to feed you.” [1 Kings 17:9]

So, you look at this verse at first glance and you’re like, *great! God’s providing again, he’s telling him where to go and who to talk to*, but there are a couple things about this verse that we need to look at. Elijah would see this verse and say, *okay, Zarephath near the city of Sidon. That’s like the epicenter for Baal worship, God*. That was the heart of Baal country that God was telling Elijah to go into, and then he told him to go to a widow and the widow would provide for him. Now, this was a patriarchal society and here’s something to know about widows in the ancient world. A woman who had lost her husband couldn’t just go and get a job to start providing for herself. That wasn’t how they lived back then, so what God is telling Elijah is *I would like you to go into the heart of Baal country where everybody is going to think that the God of Israel has absolutely no authority to provide anything or say anything or do anything and I want you to go to a widow who can’t even really provide for herself and that’s how I’m going to provide for you*. If God had told me something like this, I think I would react in one of two ways. If I was listening for God in the first place and heard Him say this, I think my first response would be to ignore Him because it’s absurd. I can’t go into the middle of the worshiping idol culture and then you provide through someone who doesn’t have anything to provide for herself. Or . . . if I was listening and willing to obey, I think I would say *let’s discuss plan B, shall we? Because this isn’t going to work, so what’s your back up, God?* But God was going to prove that He alone was the provider. That He alone was the living God and He could provide no matter the circumstances.

¹⁰ So Elijah went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, [So there's the widow, answer to question one] and he asked her, "Would you please bring me a little water in a cup?" ¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called to her, "Bring me a bite of bread, too." ¹² But she said, "I swear by the LORD your God [we're in the heart of Baal country] 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." [1 Kings 17:10-12]

So again, I would be thinking this is not looking good.

¹³ But Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you've said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what's left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son. [1 Kings 17:13]

Against all natural odds, God can and will provide in the natural and sometimes God can and will provide in the super natural. Elijah is prepared to trust God because Elijah looked back to what God had done and so he was prepared to stand firmly in His present and trust Him again. He looked back to what God had done in his life and how He was faithful and he chose to trust Him in the present as well. I don't think I always get that and I don't think it's always my natural inclination to believe that.

¹⁴ For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the LORD sends rain and the crops grow again!" ¹⁵ So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her family continued to eat for many days. ¹⁶ There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah. [1 Kings 17:14-16]

God provided. I love this quote from Tony Evans. He says, "Acting in faith means acting like God is telling the truth. If you act like God is telling the truth even though you're at the point of death it will be the greatest investment of your life. If you don't trust the Lord enough to act, you will never know His ability. An act of faith is when you act on what God says."

Elijah, the widow, and her son shared a meal together in the middle of a famine when there was no rain to speak of and that meal completely filled them. I am amazed at the level of trust and belief that Elijah and the widow showed for the living God of Israel. Regardless of their circumstances, regardless of their shortage, regardless of the unbelief in the area, regardless of the scarcity, they chose to believe that God could provide and He did. The widow had nothing and instead of hoarding what little she had that could feed her and her son one last meal, she stood with an open hand and said, "Yes, you can have what I have." Would we say that?

When we're in a tough spot, do we ask God how we could use what little we have to give to other people, to serve other people? To not hold tight to what we have, but to live out of a mentality of abundance and trust that God is present and that He can and

will provide. He is the source of provision, of life, of food, He could fill their hunger, and He can fill our hunger.

Where do you go to be fed? Does your job feed you? Your bank account? Your kids? A dating relationship? When you hunger do you hope that your grades will provide for you? For popularity and acceptance? What do you hunger for and where do you go to be fed?

I love that in Scripture we read the authoritative word of God. It says way later on down the road that Elijah was a man just like us. We don't have people that we can't understand or relate to in Scripture because God tells us that Elijah was just like me and Elijah was just like you. So if God can provide for him, why would He not also be able to provide for us? I don't know what it is for you. I know what it is for me. I've been a people person my entire life. My mom says that I gave up naps way too early because I knew that I would be missing something with people. I don't know how you can tell that a five-month-old likes to be with people, but apparently you can. I love being with people and it gets hard because somewhere along the way of my loving people, that got twisted and it turned into wanting to please people, and then continuing on it got twisted more and more to be that I found (and do find) my worth and my identity in what people think of me. That's where I go to be fed is people, and God wants to come along and say, "I provide that value and that worth for you regardless of people's criticism, regardless of people's praise. Find your value and your worth in Me, not in other people."

God took a very hungry Elijah into the heart of Baal worship—where people believed that the god of fertility would provide for them—to a widow that could barely provide for herself and they shared an abundant meal together, a filling meal together because he is God. He is *the* God, and He is the ultimate source to provide for our hunger. This is demonstrated in the greatest of ways through Jesus Christ. Through Christ, God sent salvation to us, He sent grace to us, He sent life to us when we couldn't get it ourselves and He provided purpose and belonging and meaning for us who know Him and follow Him. He provided that perfect unity to Him through Jesus and He invites us to be a part of that and to live that every day—we just have to choose it. What are you hungry for and where do you go to be fed?

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.