

Sermon - Proper 27, Year B
Elijah and the Widow
11/10/24

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In our book discussion last Sunday before the Eucharist, our conversation around the table explored the idea of “crucified love.” We spoke about the author’s meditations on the love of Jesus as uniquely beautiful, but sometimes uniquely difficult to understand. How could a “crucified love” – with its nearness to violence – be a love of peace, transformation, friendship, and grace? The reality is that we are sometimes like most of the disciples: we love Jesus, and we have tried to follow him faithfully, but we run from the Cross. At our very best, sometimes we are like Mary and John at the foot of the Cross – we have stuck around, even in the face of great agony or danger – but we do not yet know how the story is going to end. Mary and John at the foot of the Cross – they do not yet know about the Resurrection. They do not yet know about all of the magnificent events that will unfold in the life of the Church. They know only blood, falling into the dirt, and the final breaths of their beloved Son and friend who had promised them restoration but seems to have delivered only pain.

In our book discussion, the topic arose as to what we do when our own lives feel more like the crucifixion than love. What do we do when the prayers seem unanswered, or when we, like the widow of Zarephath in the Old Testament this morning, find ourselves being asked to give when so much has already been taken from us? I shared with the group that I have come to rely on a single prayer – not anything I ever sat down to come up with – but a refrain that rises up into my chest from somewhere deep inside my bones when I am unsure, or afraid, or angry, or in distress. In the midst of those moments, I repeat: *This belongs to God*. Sometimes I address it to God directly: *This belongs to you*. When I see something awful in the news: *this belongs to*

God. When I am working on a stressful emergency scene, when someone is hurt and I am afraid there is nothing I can do: *this belongs to God.* When there is conflict or misunderstanding in my family: *this belongs to God.* When I am heartbroken: *this belongs to God.* This prayer reminds me that God is present. God is active. **And that God is not me.** My vision and wisdom and capacity are limited – I cannot see beyond the foot of the Cross. But God can. And I belong to Him too.

A beautiful reality of this prayer is that when it becomes instinctive to remember that the pain and fear in our lives belong to God, you find that the prayer works the other way too. A beautiful sunset: *this belongs to God.* The laugh of a child: *this belongs to God.* A joke exchanged with a kind stranger, a sudden breakthrough in a difficult project, a meal shared together with good friends: *this belongs to God.* This prayer is not a passive one – it doesn't mean that we are not participating in these lives that God has given us. But the prayer reminds us that we, as Christians, move within an entirely different economy.

When we remember that everything belongs to God, everything changes. When things belong to *us*, we might briefly enjoy a sense of control, but it all goes downhill from there. If it is up to me, my oil and my meal will run out. Eventually, I will have to toil or steal or starve. When Elijah journeys to Zarephath and bids the poor widow to use the last of her meager resources to make a small loaf, we encounter a radical invitation. In the worldly economy, she has no reason to believe him. She has no reason to share, no reason to put herself and her son at further risk – we can see the logic of refusal. This Elijah guy might be the nicest guy in the world, but you have to think about yourself!

But Elijah replies to the woman's concerns with those words of the prophets and the angels spoken so frequently throughout the magnificent symphony of scripture: "Do not be afraid."

Do not be afraid. This is a different economy. *This belongs to God.* "She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah."

When we remember that our lives and everything within them – the world and everything within it – when we remember that all of this belongs to God, remarkable things begin to occur. We start to realize that it is not a tragedy that human beings are limited in our own power, because we are cared for by a power and love that is beyond measure. We recognize that we do not need to be in control or to despair when we cannot manage to make things or people bend to our own will. We begin to trust that even though we may only see the blood at the foot of the Cross, this patch of dirt watered by our own tears is not the end of the story.

In this abundant, God-breathed economy, we can give freely and well, because Christ is our treasure. In Him, there is always enough, and we need never be afraid. Whether we rejoice or mourn or yearn or delight, we trust that God will make a feast out of even a small bit of oil and flour. For it is all already His.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

