

The Lord provides for his faithful prophet

1 Kings 17:1-6

¹ *Elijah from Tishbe, one of the settlers in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As surely as the LORD lives, the God of Israel before whom I stand, there will be no dew or rain during the coming years, except at my word."* ² *Then the word of the LORD came to him:* ³ *"Leave this place and turn east. Hide yourself by the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan."* ⁴ *You will drink from the stream, and I will command the ravens to provide for you there."* ⁵ *So Elijah went and did just as the LORD had said. He lived in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan.* ⁶ *The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and in the evening, and he drank from the stream.*

King David wrote in one of his psalms: *"I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging for bread"* (37:25). The God who creates this world, knows how to provide for us in this world. This week I spent some time visiting members from both St. Michael's and Christ Lutheran and along the way I took notice of how the crops are going. As I drove up one driveway, I noticed a very healthy corn field to my left and the beans in the field to my right looked great as well. God sure takes care of us. That was true for the prophet Elijah. God sends Elijah to minister to his people in Israel while they were under the rule of a wicked king named Ahab. God would need to provide for his faithful prophet in a special way because of God's judgment that the prophet would announce on the nation of Israel.

Why was God's judgment needed in Israel? It's because King Ahab and his wife Jezebel were leading God's people into Baal worship. When Moses addressed God's people before they entered the Promised Land, Moses warned them that if they worship other gods, then the anger of the Lord would burn against them. He would close up the heavens so there would be no rain. The ground would not produce crops and they would perish quickly from the good land that the Lord was giving them (Deuteronomy 11:17). So Elijah shows up with news that no rain will fall on Israel until the prophet said so.

What's interesting is that Elijah just shows up abruptly on the scene. We've never heard of him before and now he's just there. There's no mention of what school of the prophets he attended. Does he have a wife and children? We don't even know where he met Ahab. In Scripture detail are often suppressed because the message is so important. God needed a prophet to faithfully announce God's word. The prophet's own name is a confession of faith. Elijah means "my God is the Lord." It's not so much the person as his message. And God made sure his faithful prophet showed up and fearlessly delivered God's word to King Ahab. "No more rain or dew until I say so."

This judgment would strike a serious blow to Baal worship. Baal was a fertility god, a storm god that its worshippers claimed sent rain to the earth. Whenever storms erupted and rain fell on the land, Baal was given credit for providing growth to crops and making the land fertile. You can see how Baal was a terrible offense to the only God who provides life and sustenance to our world. God sends Elijah to announce no rain or dew. If Baal cannot produce in its own area of expertise, its reputation will face a shattering blow. Elijah tells King Ahab that the Lord has decided to shut Baal's faucet off. It kind of reminds us of what God did to Egypt. They had their many gods, like their sun god Re. But God plagued them with total darkness and shut out the

sun's light completely. With ten plagues that crippled Egypt, the Lord made it clear that he alone is God. And he's about to do the same in Israel.

Elijah announced that there would be neither dew nor rain for a number of years "*except at my word.*" His word was the word of the Lord. The Lord was the real monarch. His will is decisive. He controls everything. Elijah was showing Ahab that he was a genuine prophet of the Lord. He would soon prove that by his words coming true. The Lord raised him up Elijah to be God's mouthpiece. He received his messages directly from the Lord. He would faithfully deliver his messages to whom God sent him.

I had the privilege the last two Sundays to attend installation services for two recent seminary graduates who have been assigned to congregations in our area. One thing I noticed in the service folders for both installations was that there was no written biography of either young man. Was it because they are young and haven't had much of a life that's worth sharing in writing? Maybe like Elijah, it's not the person but the message that counts. We pray these two ministers like all faithful ministers will focus on the message they will preach and teach as God's spokesmen. That message includes God's law which points out sin and our need for a Savior. That message also includes good news that God sent his Son to be our Savior. Several hundred years after Elijah, the Lord sent another Elijah to prepare the way for our Savior. John the Baptist was that second Elijah who prepared his listeners with a call to repent. He would baptize people to forgive their sins. As I laid my hand on one of the young men we installed, I encouraged him to be a John the Baptist pointing his people to the Lamb of God who takes away the world's sins and making sure Jesus becomes greater while we become less. All who put their trust in that Savior, like the 7,000 in Israel who did not bow a knee to Baal, will not be disappointed. And even if they must die for their faith, the way that wicked King Ahab had his neighbor Naboth put to death for not selling him his vineyard, God would provide them safe passage to the eternal promised land won by our Savior.

God was calling Ahab to repent through the prophet Elijah. After pronouncing God's judgment to Ahab, God knew he needed to get his faithful prophet away from that wicked king. So he has his prophet hide out in an area not far from Gilead where Elijah was from. He'd hide out in a ravine on the east side of the Jordan. Elijah would have water to drink from the stream in that ravine. But what about food? God had that figured out too. He tells his prophet, "*I will command the ravens to provide for you there.*" So the prophet obeys his Lord. He goes to the ravine east of the Jordan River. And twice each day ravens bring him bread and meat to eat.

So what truths can we learn in these verses? First of all, our God remains involved with his creation. He controls every aspect of it. In Psalm 147 we read, "*Respond to the Lord with thanksgiving. Make music to our God on the lyre. He is the one who covers the sky with clouds. He determines rain for the earth. He makes grass sprout on the mountains. He gives their food to cattle and to the young ravens when they call*" (7-9).

We learn how God uses elements of his creation to accomplish his will. He used ravens to feed Elijah. He uses people to spread the gospel. By us sharing our faith he brings others to faith.

He uses water, bread and wine to deliver forgiveness, life, and salvation. So we treasure these gifts and use them faithfully to keep faith alive and growing inside each one of us.

In this Scripture we see God involved with and concerned about the human race. So much so that he became human. He entered life fulfilling every promise that Scripture made of him. He took on human flesh to obey God for us and to suffer and die in our place. He did all that so people might live with him forever. And this present world corrupted by sin he has promised to destroy. He will bring about a holy, perfect new creation which will never end. The apostle Peter wrote about it in his second epistle, *“And now, by that same word, the heavens and earth have been stored up for fire, since they are being kept until the day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly...On that day the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will be dissolved as they burn with great heat, and the earth and what was done on it will be burned up...That day will cause the heavens to be set on fire and destroyed, and the elements to melt as they burn with great heat. But according to his promise we look forward to new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells”* (3:7,10,12-13)

One more thing we learn from this Scripture. God hears and graciously answers the prayers of those who believe in him. Elijah epitomizes this. In James chapter five, we are told, *“The prayer of a righteous person is able to do much because it is effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain, and the land produced its harvest”* (16-18). And prayer is a powerful tool that God allows us to use. May we never take for granted the power of prayer. A wedding gift that my wife and I received 30 plus years ago was a placard that said: *“If you can’t sleep, don’t count sheep. Talk to the Shepherd.”* How important that we use every opportunity God gives us to take everything to him in prayer. How often Jesus would spend time by himself conversing with his heavenly Father in prayer. On the night of his arrest with that mob quickly approaching and his close friends catching some z’s, our Lord had some intense moments in prayer making sure his Father’s will was done and our souls were saved. Now we have total access all the time. Let’s use it.

Mankind’s salvation was on God’s mind when sent his prophet Elijah to confront the wicked King Ahab. There still was hope for the king. He would witness God’s greatness, while Baal remained silent. God made sure his prophet was safe and well supplied while the rest in Israel searched for any morsel of food they could find. But our Lord’s faithful prophet didn’t need to worry. God provided for his every need. And when the stream dried up, God would provide for his faithful prophet by a widow in Zerahath. He’d kept him safe so he could proclaim God’s message faithfully.

That remains God’s will for believers in our world today. Our world needs us to use the gifts God has given so we can share God’s salvation in Christ. And be sure to pray for God’s Spirit to give us words to speak and work saving faith in the hearts of others. God still needs faithful believers pointing sinners to their Savior so they find in Christ forgiveness for every sin and eternal life with our Lord. And we never have to worry. Our gracious God will supply us with everything we need. God bless us in our mission.