

11 Kings 17:8-16; Hebrews 9:24-28

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

It's kind of interesting, to me at least, that we get anything about Elijah at all in our Bible, because Elijah is a prophet in Israel. Now okay, maybe that is a little confusing - isn't all of the Old Testament about Israel? It isn't at the point in history that Elijah comes in. The nation of Israel, when it was under King Saul and then King David and King Solomon, was this one huge nation along the Mediterranean coastline. But when King Solomon dies, his children can't get along (sibling rivalry), and so the nation of Israel breaks in two. Now it doesn't break evenly, and the northern kingdom is the much larger kingdom. The northern kingdom calls itself Israel. If you remember that there were twelve tribes of Israel, well ten of those twelve tribes make up the northern kingdom of Israel. Two of those tribes remain in the southern kingdom that calls itself Judah. It is in the southern kingdom where Jerusalem is. It is in the southern kingdom, in Jerusalem, where the "true" temple is. See, those folks up in Israel, up in the northern kingdom, they had to build themselves a temple. But it wasn't in Jerusalem, so all of the folks down in Judah, down in Jerusalem, would look down their noses at those people up in northern Israel - "ah well *you* worship at Bethel, but *we* worship in the temple." So it is kind of interesting to me that we get anything at all about Elijah because the writers of our Bible came predominately from the southern kingdom, from Judah.

But we do get this wonderful series of stories about Elijah, which we only have one tonight. Elijah comes onto the scene about the same time that Ahab comes onto the scene as king in the northern kingdom. Another thing we need to remember is that back when David was king, when David was king of the whole shebang, God made a promise with David. God made a covenant with David that there would always be a descendant of David on the throne in Jerusalem. And there is, up until the time that Jerusalem is overrun, there is always a descendant of David on the throne in Jerusalem. Not so up in the northern kingdom of Israel. In the northern kingdom a son, very rarely (I think there were only two times) that a son followed father onto the throne. More often than not it's a military coup that takes over. And so Ahab comes to the throne. Now Ahab's trying to make peace with those around him and so one of the ways that you make peace, like Solomon did, is that you marry into somebody else's family. In Ahab's case he married into the kingdom that was just to the north of them. He married the king of Sidon's daughter. Well there is not necessarily anything wrong with that except that in Sidon they don't worship God. They don't worship the Lord God Almighty, they worship many and various gods' one of which is a god called Ba'al. And Ba'al is the god of rain for the country of Sidon.

Elijah sees that Ahab has married Jezebel from Sidon. Elijah sees that Jezebel brings with her the worship of Ba'al to Israel. Elijah sees that all around Israel, Ahab, in order to please his bride, is putting up places of worship for Ba'al. This is not sitting very well with Elijah at all, so Elijah prays to God and God says, 'until we eliminate these places of worship for Ba'al there shall be a drought.' See, it's a little play there because Ba'al is the god of rain.

And God says I am the real thing, no rain until Ahab repents. So there is a drought going on in Israel. Well now we might be a little bit familiar with what happens when a drought comes, it's kind of hard to get crops, isn't it? People tend to starve at times of drought. Elijah, where did he go though, this is such a wonderful story? Elijah, where does he go? He goes to Sidon. He's outside of his own realm. He goes to Sidon, to the city where Jezebel was born and raised, where her father is king, and it is there where he comes upon this widow. And he says to this widow, 'give me something to drink please' and as the hospitality of the day demands, she went and got him something to drink. But then he pushes it - 'Would you bring me some bread too, please?' What does she say? "As the Lord your God lives, my son and I have just enough food to eat it and then we're going to starve to death." Elijah looks at her and says, "the Lord God Almighty" (notice it goes from the Lord *your* God to the *Lord God Almighty*) "will provide for you, will provide for us. Make me something to eat and there will be enough for you and your son as well." Not only is there enough for Elijah, not only is there enough for the widow and her son, but there is enough for them for days. It doesn't end until the drought ends. (The drought ends at the end of chapter eighteen. So if you want the rest of the story you need to keep reading. It's really fun stuff.)

This woman had no reason to believe Elijah. She knew he was not a worshiper of Ba'al. He apparently had that much of a reputation. But she apparently - and I am reading into it - but I think she saw that Elijah was a man of faith. A man who was faith filled. A man who was striving to live out his faith as he came to her and ask for food and water, and actually he ended up staying there at her house for quite a long time. (He had a room, but you have to keep reading in chapter seventeen to find that out. Not that I want you to go home and keep reading chapter seventeen or anything.) Elijah is this faith filled man.

When we look at our gospel story this evening, we see we have another faith-filled person, as well. Jesus is sitting there by the temple. The treasury that he is sitting in front of is kind of like a box that people would walk by and you would drop your offering in there. In a couple of minutes we'll have the offering basket come along. The treasury is far more public, this is out in the street. And apparently there would be people who would make a big show of how much money they're putting into the treasury and Jesus and his disciples are sitting there watching this and sounds like Jesus is doing a little bit of running commentary on people as their walking by putting their money in. And he sees the rich come by and making their show and dropping their bags of money or coins in and making a great noise that they will, but along comes another widow. (Another thing to remember about widows in that time, both in Elijah's time and Jesus' time are that a widow without a male in her life was more then worthless. She couldn't own land, she couldn't buy or sell anything.) Jesus sees this widow, and he sees what she drops in there. Basically worthless, what can two copper coins do? What is a penny worth? Well pretty close to the equivalent of dropping in a quarter in the plate. How can that really help the budget? Jesus says that woman is more faith filled then all of the other people because she has given of herself. She has given all that she had left. She is a faith-filled person.

Now I don't necessarily mean to sound like I am talking about money. Because I think that both of these stories are about **more** then money. The widow with Elijah apparently didn't have enough money to go out and buy more flour. This widow in the gospel story gave all

that she had left. It's not about money, but it is about being faith filled and what we do with the faith that we are filled with. It's about what we've got. Not financially, not physically, not the stuff we have, but what is it that we've got. What is it that's important to me? Because when I look around at my life and I look around at my house and I look around at my office upstairs, there's really not a whole lot of things that I need. There's lots of other stuff I could use: a flat panel 50" television screen would be nice, but I realize that I don't need it. There's lots of more study books or text books that I would really like, but I don't *need* them. There's a really cool laptop computer I saw, but I don't *need* it. What do I need that I don't have? Well really, not a whole lot. What do I have that I don't need? Well, I have a lot of stuff, a lot of stuff that I really don't need. I have a lot of things that cost a lot of money, or if I were to sell them or had never purchased them to begin with, we're looking at a lot of money. Which made me think about wealth and about the widow, the widow with the coins and the widow who all she had was a little bit of food left in her house. I logged on a website called Globalrichlist.com and it asked you what your income is and I typed in my personal income and I found out that in my income alone I am in the top 2% of the wealthiest people in the world. When I type in our household income, The Brock household is in the top .75% of the wealthiest people in the world. I am a pastor and my wife runs a church camp. We aren't necessarily rolling in money, but our household is in the .75% of the wealthiest people in the world. So I typed a little bit more, at \$10,000 a year you are in the top 13% of the wealthiest people in the world. So I whacked off another zero, at \$1,000 a year, you are still above 50%. You have to go down to \$850 a year, a year in order to be at the 50% mark of the wealthiest people in the world, or the overall annual income of the people.

This is not something I really want to hear. The guitar that I am going to play here when we have our next song, cost more than that 50 percentiles mark. What do I need that I don't have? And what do I have that I don't need? Makes me a little reluctant to listen to this lesson, but I also remember that in the stories that we get from Elijah, not the one tonight, but the other ones in chapter seventeen and eighteen and nineteen, often times Elijah is reluctant to answer God's call as well. Elijah has seen this wonderful miracle, the very next story with Elijah is that the widow's son falls ill and dies and through God's power Elijah resuscitates the young boy and brings him back to life. And yet, just a few more verses on he runs away afraid for his life, afraid of what Ahab is going to do to him. He has seen the power of God at work in an unending jar of flour, in bringing a child back to life. He runs because Ahab puts a price on his head and he is afraid he will die.

Elijah was faith-filled, but he would stumble. I strive to be faith-filled, even though I am in the top .75%, but what is it to be faith-filled? It isn't about money and it isn't about things. It's about what we do with them. It is about what we do with what we have, that's what being faith-filled is about. So let us all listen to God's call as God does indeed call us all to faithfulness regardless of where we are along in that percentiles mark, in regardless of where we are in our chronological walk, regardless of where we are in our faith journey, God calls to us. God calls us all to action, God calls us to be faithful AND God calls us to be faith-filled. Amen.