

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
1 Kings 17:8-16  
September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015

I woke up this morning knowing the first thing that I needed to do is get dressed and get a little to eat before making my way over to church. When I went down to the kitchen to get something to eat, I wasn't thinking, "I wonder if there is any food in the house?" I was thinking, rather, "What will I eat this morning?" We have a variety of breakfast cereals to choose from – healthy and sugary alike. As I eat, my surroundings are pleasant and comfortable. I look down at my bowl and see enough food to satisfy for the morning. I even might think about what will be for lunch or even supper. Often I try to forget, or it never even comes to mind, that there are millions upon millions of miserable creatures in the world who wake up in filthy rags and terrible conditions. These are the starving children and hungry adults. I would just hate, it would crush me, to see my own child wasting away because they have nothing to eat. It's hard for us to imagine.

I know why. We all are inclined to shut out of our minds the unpleasant. Furthermore, we don't compare ourselves with the faraway poor. We compare ourselves with our rich neighbors. We rather call to mind most readily what great things they have, and what they can do with their money, and then feel sorry and take pity on ourselves because we don't have those things. When we compare ourselves to the wrong people, we focus on what we lack, instead of what we have. And, what we have, is truly a blessing in so many ways.

Let's learn to contrast for a truer picture of life. Instead of comparing our lives to the privileged few, let's look at the great masses of those who lack instead. For example, this widow of Zarephath. She had a lot of things working against her. She had a son that was a blessing, but also another mouth to feed. She was a widow, so she had no one to take care of her... women just couldn't pick up the pieces of losing their spouse, get a job and find a new husband. They didn't have those options. She was poor – dirt poor – with only oil and flour in her house as she picked up free sticks to build a fire, bake a cake of bread, and then readied her son and herself to die. How terrible.

And given this terrible circumstance, it's no wonder why she tells the prophet, "Instead of giving you a little food, I think I will eat the little food – we are soooo hungry – and my son needs to eat – so why don't you just get lost and let us eat and die." Any of us can understand that.

But here is where it all turns around for the woman – and also for any of us – as Jesus would reinforce this very point in the Gospel text for today from Matthew chapter six. Elijah says to the woman, and beloved, to you too, "*Do not fear...*" Then he goes on to say, "*The Lord, the God of Israel, says, 'The jar of flour shall not be spent, the jug of oil shall not be empty...'*" She went and did what the prophet said. She trusted with a trust beyond understanding. She believed in the Lord, which is no small thing, and the Lord provided.

Again, I have to go back to it – I can't imagine what kind of hunger and fear this woman and her son had?? I can't imagine her level of concern. But the first thing from our Lord through Elijah to her is, "*Do not fear.*" The first thing from our Lord Jesus to His disciples about fear and anxiety about how God provides is, "*Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on... etc...*" Many of us don't fear such things, so Jesus must not be talking about you. Wrong! We fear, alright. We have anxiety, alright.

None of us are completely immune to such things because all of us have a human nature. The words, "The Lord will provide" are often spoken but not completely trusted – by any of us.

It is true that the Lord has actually provided for you more than you will ever need, and none of us will be so much “without” that we fear death by starvation... but we do fear death. We fear death by fear of losing our job, or even struggling in a class at school. We fear death when a family situation looks so terrible that we feel stuck, or the ones we love are stuck, or our lives are just on hold because nothing seems to be going right. We fear death by holding to the belief that if this one thing I’m worried about doesn’t go my way, I don’t know what I will do. Will you die if it doesn’t? Well, if it’s a custody battle, probably not – but you may feel like dying inside. If it’s your last morsel of food, or, your last hope in curing a horrible disease, then maybe yes. Either way, in so much – big and small – we fear death. Because it feels like death to us.

It’s hard, but listen to the Lord. I know, easier said than done. “*Do not fear*,” says the Lord. “*Do not be anxious about your life*,” says the Lord. How can we not? Through a faith and a trust that can only come through him.

Beloved, if you are still anxious, if you struggle with your trust in the Lord, I want you to know, this doesn’t make me concerned whether or not you are a good Christian. It makes me realize, and it should make you realize too, that you are human. And, as humans, we daily struggle with keeping our eyes on where true providence for our lives comes from, instead of all the other things that press on us at every side. You will struggle with this. You will continue to struggle with this. My concern would be more if you stopped struggling with this. Because, that would indicate to me, that perhaps you have given up. You have given up the daily struggle of life, with talking it out with God, with faith and sometimes that lack thereof, and the need to continue to return in faith and repentance to what is always true and certain. You will struggle. It’s a fact in this fallen world. Who, through it all, will you hold to? Who will you trust when the Lord says to you, like He did through Elijah, “*Do not fear?*”

Beloved, hearing those words, “*Do not fear*,” are repeated for you for a reason. Because you will!! Do not fear and trust in the Lord. He is with you. So, when all you have left is a little oil and some flour, yes, the words are the same for you as for the widow – do not fear. The Lord will provide. How? I’m not sure. But I know He does. Want to know how I know? Because He says He will. He illustrates His promise in the Word time and time again. He does this for you – in times of great success and great tribulation.

When the Lord says, “*Do not fear*,” it doesn’t mean that you won’t have fear. It means that by grace through faith in Christ, you have nothing to fear. There are things I’m more scared of than others. Food – the basic substance for life – is not one of them. But fear is still in the hearts of sinners like you and me. But take heart, beloved. The Lord crushes fear. In Christ, the Lord provides through all and in all. The Lord calls out to you and to me – the ones gathering sticks at the gate, and says, “*Do not fear*”. It matters not what concerns us most at this very moment.

I woke up this morning knowing I would have enough to eat. But what about enough strength to preach, enough courage to stand up to that proclaimer of falsehood, the energy I need to do my daily tasks through this week, the ability to handle the struggles that surprise. I shall not fear. The Lord is with me. The Lord gives me strength. I am the Lord’s and the Lord loves me. I have all that I need because I have Jesus – even in the worst of times. Beloved, no matter what you fear, you have Jesus. Jesus will crush your fears. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.