

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
1 Kings 17:8-16  
September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016

A week or so ago, the quarterback for the San Francisco Forty-Niners, Colin Kaepernick, decided to “stand-up” to injustice by “sitting-down” during the national anthem before a football preseason game. His reason: the injustice of police brutality toward those who don’t deserve such treatment and how the police seem to be getting away with it. The very flag that he did not stand up for is the same flag that gives him that right. However, many feel that Kaepernick’s actions were disrespectful to the men and women who serve in our military – especially those who gave the ultimate price during times of war.

Labor Day, which we celebrate tomorrow, also has its roots in injustice. It began as a recognition of the social and economic achievements of workers who have fought for fair wages and better working conditions throughout time. Some of these injustices were perhaps big, and some of them small. However, today we recognize the contributions that workers have made for the sake of strength, prosperity and well-being in this country.

But perhaps even a greater injustice occurred in the Old Testament text appointed for this the 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity. And this injustice comes from God. A woman from Zarephath was commanded by God to give the prophet, Elijah, food to eat when he comes and visits. She was an unfortunate woman. She was a woman with a child and no husband. She was a widow which means she had nothing – or at least this is to say – she had practically nothing. And God commands this widow to give Elijah food to eat.

And so, when he comes and asks for water, she brings water. Then, when he asks her to bring a morsel of food, she has something to say. “This is an injustice,” she might have called out. “*As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I’m gathering a couple of sticks that I might go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.*” “In other words, oh man of God, I heard the command of God that you would come asking for food. I hear what you are saying. I protest! This is an injustice! I’m as poor as dirt. My boy and I are near death and this is all we have left. So, Elijah, you and your God can stick it!” And if that were to be the conversation, I think any of us would understand. We would side with the widow and her son. Sometimes we get the feeling that the injustices of God prevail in the lives of us sinners.

Allow me to tell you what led up to all this. You see, an evil man by the name of Ahab became king of Israel. He married a woman, Jezebel, who was the daughter of another king called Ethbaal. He had the word of the false god “Baal” in his name. So, you know he’s not that nice of a guy. Jezebel his daughter was perhaps even worse. Well, God judged Israel because Ahab chased after other gods and set up worship stations for the Israelites to worship these false gods. God had enough, so he told Elijah to tell Ahab that there would be a huge famine in the land because of his and Israel’s indiscretions. At God’s direction, Elijah ran away from Ahab and God commanded ravens to bring Elijah food while he was hiding.

It’s at this point that Elijah goes to the widow at Zarephath to ask for food. Getting fed by birds is one thing. They beckon at the call of God and carry forth their work faithfully. But when you have a starving woman and a dying son, who have next to nothing, who don’t have enough food to even feed themselves, gets told by God to feed a runaway prophet, a huge injustice has occurred. And the widow understandably fires back at Elijah, and in turn, God, for taking what little she has left, and also for producing a famine over the whole land to begin with. This is an injustice.

We can relate. We got passed over for the promotion -- Injustice. That scholarship that should have been mine was given to someone else -- injustice. That rate hike we weren't expecting really took a toll on our finances this month -- injustice. Every time we have said, "It's not fair," we see someone else demanding our little bit of food that we have left... that little food to feed our family... that little food to keep us alive. It's being taken from us. Rights are being taken from us. Freedoms are being taken from us. People are dying senselessly without repercussion. It's an injustice. Any of us could find at least one of these realities to define our circumstances right now.

Yes, injustice is real and you have experienced it in one way or another. Expect it, kids. We can keep on expecting it, adults. And no, we don't have to take it lying down. But, at the same time, don't use it as an excuse to sulk while the needs of others -- and your own needs -- increase.

So, instead of shutting others out -- even shutting God out -- know that whatever it is that troubles us right now is trying to turn us inward away from the helping hands of our friends and the providing hand of God. For example, look at the text. This woman would have ignored God and his prophet. Her suffering was great. Her distress is beyond measure. But she trusted that God would provide in the midst of her great struggles and He did. When we turn inward on ourselves, we tell God to "stick it." We sulk in our sufferings to the point that we would much rather keep these things to ourselves rather than lay them at the feet of the cross.

The Lord is teaching us a lesson. Though we be without everything we need for this body and life, we are not without the providing hand of God. In the midst of famine, we are fed. And, a bit of a spoiler alert for next Sunday, the woman's son dies, but God raises him back to life. In the midst of death, we have life. Drought had affected this poor woman and her son, but God, as He only can, turned it away. Death will befall this poor boy, and we will hear about that next week, but God turned death away and gives life.

Life is filled with injustice... you know how to name them. There is even injustice in famine and in death, not only for a widow from Zarephath but also for you. These things are not supposed to happen. That's why it's an injustice.

But be reminded, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it just so happened that the biggest injustice ever known has given you the biggest undeserved gift ever granted. The biggest injustice in human history happened two thousand years ago on a hill called Calvary outside of Jerusalem's city walls. Two men were receiving justice for their crimes. They were being crucified on both sides of the man who didn't deserve such a fate. A totally innocent man He was -- and He was also God.

He died there on Good Friday for you. He took every one of your sins upon Himself that day and carried forth the most unjust act ever accomplished in human history. Why did He do it? Why did He take all the dirty sins of people like you and me upon Himself to make sure you are fed and brought back to life? One simple reason. Because He loves you more than you can ever imagine.

Beloved, live in this assurance. Live for your Lord. Live in His works so that others may see this life-giving injustice in their lives. We will stand for Christ and live for Him. Because through it all -- the hardship, the temptations and the trials, Jesus stands for us while nailed on a tree. His gifts are poured out for you. Receive this injustice placed upon our Lord. It's true, this is an unjust world we live in. But thanks be to God, He knows about such things better than any of us. And instead of just saying, "Ya, I know how you feel," He did something about it. And now you have it. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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