

Pr. Colleen Montgomery

25 After Pentecost B

11 November 2018

1 Kings 17:8-16, Psalm 146, Hebrews 9:24-28, Mark 12:38-44

Note to the reader: *This is a monologue sermon. It is the story from 1 Kings told from the perspective of the widow. This sermon is ideally read by a woman of any age. If read by a man, please specify that the words are a woman's.*

It hasn't rained for a long time. Over three years. Life was hard before the drought. After my husband died, my son and I have struggled to survive. Life was hard then, but it is even harder now. My son should be taller and stronger, but instead he is hungry and withering. I am hungry and withering.

Apparently the king and some prophet are fighting about whose god is the best. Baal is supposed to bring the rain. He is the storm god after all. Baal brings the rain, the crops grow, we all live.

But this Elijah guy has said that Baal isn't a real god. Elijah says that his God is the real god. In his language, his name apparently means God is the Lord. Elijah's God has sent this drought to prove that Baal is not the real deal. I'm not sure I understand it all. But what I do understand is that my son and I are hungry and withering.

Well, I guess, I should say that we were hungry and we were withering. Because this Elijah and his God changed everything.

[pause]

I was out collecting sticks for a cooking fire when a strange man approached me. I had never seen him before and he didn't look like he was from around here. He asked me to get him some water. I did. He looked very thirsty. And even in this drought, there is still drinking water to share. He said his name was Elijah, and then he asked for bread. This request was going to be more difficult.

You see, the whole reason I was out there getting sticks was to build a fire to bake bread. To bake bread with the last little bit of flour and the last little bit of oil I had. I had stretched our reserves out for as long as I could. But our stomachs have been grumbling for weeks.

I eat as little as I can, trying to convince my son that I am not that hungry and that he can eat more. But he hears my stomach groan. I don't know who would take care of him if I died before him. That was the one blessing of all of this. We would eat this last loaf together and then in a few days time we would die together. He would never be alone.

So needless to say, I did not have any bread to give this man and I told him as much. There was not enough for us, so there wasn't going to be any for him. I didn't think he would be that surprised or mad. We are in a drought after all and everyone is hungry.

Instead, he responded with the oddest thing. He said, "Don't be afraid." Isn't that strange? I suppose this was a kind thing to say. But I wasn't really afraid. I had been afraid. When the drought settled in and it got harder and harder to take care of my son. But by the time we were talking, I had accepted our fate, our death.

Anyhow, he goes on to say that his God, the God of Israel, is going to take care of us. The flour and oil won't run out until the drought is over. He told me to make some bread for him and then for my son and me, and this is all going to be okay.

I did not believe him. I have not had the luxury to worry about what the gods, the king, and the prophets have been fighting about. I did not really care what this God had to say to me.

But at the same time, I had accepted that my son and I would soon die. What would be the difference if our final meal was just one-third of a loaf instead of one-half? So I baked the bread.

I kneaded the flour together with the oil and water. I baked it until the crust was just the way my son likes it. I let the bread cool until it was cool enough to touch. I savored each bite, assuming it was my last. We went to bed that night and I slept a dreamless sleep.

When the sun came up the next day, I woke up. My stomach was not the emptiest it has ever been, but the ever-present hunger was there. Like I said, I didn't really believe what Elijah had said about his God. But I figured I better check the jars just to be sure. Just in case.

Though I had done my best to shake every last spec of flour from its jar and scrape every last drop of oil from its jug the day before, though they were empty when I went to bed, there was more flour and more oil in them that morning.

I did not believe my ears when Elijah told me this promise. I could not believe my eyes when I saw the flour and oil in the jars. I could not believe my hands as I hastily mixed the flour with oil and water. I could not believe my nose as I smelled the bread baking over the fire. I could only believe my mouth when I tasted the warm, fresh bread. I tasted hope. I tasted life. I ate, and I believed.

[pause]

It has been many days now since Elijah had come to stay with my son and me. The jar of flour and jug of oil continue to sustain us. Most days, I trust fully in Elijah's God. Some days, I still can't believe that this is all real. Fewer days, I pray to Baal to send the rains back, but I don't think Baal can help us anymore.

I don't know what is in store for my son and me. My son is getting stronger, fuller, and maybe a little taller, but he has a long road before he is as strong, as full, and as tall as he should be. I pray Elijah and his God stay with us for a little longer. We would be dead by now without them.

To tell you the truth, each time we gather at the table and I eat this miracle bread, I believe a little more. I trust a little more. I let go of my faith in Baal and my faith in the God of Israel increases. This bread is changing me, is changing us. Would you like some? I think it could change you too.

Inspiration came from Kathryn M. Schifferdecker's commentary found here:
https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1512

