

I.N.I.

3rd Sunday after Pentecost
June 25, 2017
I Kings 17:17-24

In Christ Jesus, who has power over death, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When and where was the first resurrection recorded in the Bible? It might surprise you to know that it is in our text--Elijah's raising the son of the widow of Zarephath.

In the unlikeliest places and in the unlikeliest ways the Lord has been providing for his servant, the prophet Elijah. You might remember that Israel was enduring a three year drought because of King Ahab's idolatry and apostasy. Together he and his wife Queen Jezebel led the people into the worship of Baal and Asherah. The people abandoned the Lord Jehovah, so for a time the Lord abandoned them.

God distanced Himself from His people by sending His prophet to the brook Kidron, so that while the rest of Israel was suffering from the drought, Elijah was receiving needed water from the brook and food miraculously from ravens. But the brook eventually dried up so the Lord sent Elijah to the heathen city of Zarephath, Queen Jezebel's hometown. What good thing could come from there?

Elijah soon found out. He was directed by the Lord to a poor starving widow who had one son. She was gathering sticks to cook their very last meal of bread. But by the strength alone of God's promise through the prophet, this heathen widow used up her last bit of flour and oil to make Elijah a meal instead of one for her son and herself. God, in turn, kept His Word spoken by His prophet. We read in I Kings 17:16 **THE BIN OF FLOUR WAS NOT USED UP, NOR DID THE JAR OF OIL RUN DRY, ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF THE LORD WHICH HE SPOKE BY ELIJAH.**

What a powerful testimony to the power and trustworthiness of God's Word. Elijah also stayed in an upper room in the widow's home and no doubt told the widow more about the Lord God Jehovah. All was well. Until suddenly the widow's son is struck by a deadly illness. His condition grows worse and he dies.

The widow's response to her son's death is not unusual. People in pain, even strong Christians, much less new-born believers like this widow, often speak in ways that seem inconsistent with their faith. This woman, who already had lost her husband, now loses her only child. She is angry and upset, no doubt confused and also fearful. Her conscience bothers her and she wonders if her son's death was God's punishment upon her for some particular sin from her past. We read her words to Elijah again: **"WHAT HAVE I TO DO WITH YOU, O MAN OF GOD? HAVE YOU COME TO ME TO BRING MY SIN TO REMEMBRANCE, AND TO KILL MY SON?"**

There is a direct connection between sin and death, sin brought death into the world, and sickness and death are constant reminders that we live in a sinful world, but the Bible assures us that God never punishes His children for sins they have committed. Jesus took that punishment upon Him. Paul tells us in Romans 8:1: **THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION TO THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS.**

The widow is beside herself with grief. She is wondering why she even let Elijah into her home and had anything to do with him. She is thinking that prior to his arrival she was an insignificant person who might have escaped God's notice. But once the prophet came and God did this great thing for them, He now noticed her sinful past and her life came under His righteous judgment and her son died as a result. Sound familiar. That is how many people in this world think and believe.

But God was working in this woman a conviction of her sin to be able to show her beyond any doubt His great grace and compassion, power and glory.

Elijah responds by saying, **"GIVE ME YOUR SON."** The fact that the mother was willing to give her son to the prophet at this most painful moment tells us something about her faith. Even in her doubt and fear, she still trusted the Lord. An unbelieving mother would have clung to her child in her grief thinking why hand him over to the one who played a part in his death?

Elijah too is confused and wondering why this occurred. Faith simply trusts, it does not always comprehend or understand why God does what He does. He cries out to God: **"O LORD MY GOD, HAVE YOU ALSO BROUGHT TRAGEDY ON THE WIDOW WITH WHOM I LODGE, BY KILLING HER SON?"** Jehovah, the God of promise. My God, why has this happened? Why have you done this thing?

Elijah is not wondering whether God has caused this to happen. He knows perfectly well God has. He just can't understand the why! Especially to this widow, this widow who trusted in His promise and obeyed His command through faith. It did not seem to make sense. But that is not what Elijah is asking for. He does not ask God to explain Himself, he boldly asks God for a great display of His amazing love and power.

He puts the boy on his bed and three times lays on him crying out: **"O LORD MY GOD, I PRAY, LET THIS CHILD'S SOUL COME BACK TO HIM."** Elijah believes that the same God who in terrifying judgment condemns the sinner, also shows mercy and love to the sinner.

We are simply told **THEN THE LORD HEARD THE VOICE OF ELIJAH; AND THE SOUL OF THE CHILD CAME BACK TO HIM, AND HE REVIVED.** We said earlier this is the first instance of a resurrection in the Bible. Isn't it interesting that it occurred outside of Israel and was performed on a non-Jew, a Gentile.

Last Sunday we heard of King Solomon praying to God that He would hear the prayer of the stranger and foreigner in His temple. Here God hears the prayer of His prophet and blesses the stranger, the foreigner with life. It reminds us of what the prophet Hosea wrote in cha. 2:23: **AND I WILL HAVE MERCY ON HER WHO HAD NOT OBTAINED MERCY; THEN I WILL SAY TO THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'YOU ARE MY PEOPLE!' AND THEY SHALL SAY, 'YOU ARE MY GOD!'**

God the creator of life, is also the giver of life. Paul says that **God gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.** Jesus said, **I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.**

And Jesus proved that by His works, His actions, His miracles---healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, life to the dead, and preaching the Gospel message of forgiveness of sins and eternal life through His suffering, death and resurrection. Jesus' words and actions were meant to work together, the actions powerfully proving the truth of the words.

So also here. Elijah with the living boy rushes down the steps and says to the mother: **"SEE, YOUR SON LIVES!"** One commentator wrote: "Truth does not need to be dressed up in fancy clothes to make it more believable, the way lies often do. It carries its convincing power within itself."

The woman is convinced. She sees her child, now alive, and then she speaks her own testimony of faith and trust in every Word from God she had heard from the prophet. She too had found life, life in Jehovah's name. She declares: **"NOW BY THIS I KNOW THAT YOU ARE A MAN OF GOD, AND THAT THE WORD OF THE LORD IN YOUR MOUTH IS THE TRUTH."**

Our theme this morning is the words of Elijah to the mother:

"SEE, YOUR SON LIVES!"

I: BY GOD'S LOVE, WHICH IS STRONGER THAN DEATH.

II: BY A MIRACLE THAT CONFIRMS THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD.

Jesus was speaking to the people of His hometown of Nazareth who were rejecting Him because they thought they knew Him (He was Joseph's son) and their familiarity with Him led them not to believe His claim to be the Messiah. He said this in Luke 4:23-30 **"You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.' Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow."**

The idolatry and apostasy of the Northern Kingdom of Israel brought about the Lord's judgment on them by means of the drought but also the Lord's grace went to this Gentile widow. They had

God's Word. They had seen His powerful works for centuries and yet rejected Him. This widow believed God's promises, obeyed the Lord and received miracles to confirm and strengthen her faith.

So also the Jews of Jesus day, had God's Word that Jesus spoke to them. They saw His miracles, but they did not believe and did not obey. But we know that God's love is stronger than death. In fact because of Jesus' love for us He saved us from the death we deserved because of our sins. By His love He conquered death and brought life and immortality to us. The action of Jesus perfect life of obedience, of His miracles, of His suffering, death and the miracle of His resurrection back to life confirms the truth of God's Word that He **"so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believe in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."**

So today we can declare to all people, **"See, God's Son lives!"** His love has broken the bonds of death that we were enslaved in because of our sins. His love has set us free from the fear of death and assured us that we too shall live after death eternally. Jesus' death was a payment for our sin and His resurrection proves that death has lost its sting!

What a blessing that God has chosen us to see His Son who was dead and is alive again. What a blessing that we know of His love that is stronger than death and conquers death. What a blessing that His actions toward us, found in His Word, confirms the truth of His Word.

May we not be like the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the people of Jesus day and take our Lord's love and His Word for granted by not hearing it, not believing it and not obeying it.

Rather may the Holy Spirit lead us to be like the widow of Zarephath---believe and trust what our Lord promises us, gladly obey His Word and declare, **"NOW BY THIS I KNOW THAT THE WORD OF THE LORD IS THE TRUTH."**

Amen.