

Enduring in the Faith, Even in the Face of the End

Hear again the Word of God for this sixteenth Sunday after Holy Trinity.

And said the woman to Elijah, "Now I know thus: you are (a) man of Elohim, and (the) Word of YHWH in your mouth (is) Truth!"¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Again, this year, the Lord has brought us in His grace into the section of the Church Year that was given long ago to encourage Christians to endurance in the Faith. In these no more than five weeks each year, the readings are proclaimed to strengthen each and all of us in our trust in God's Word. It is His Word – Visible in the Sacraments, and audible in the Scripture readings – that gives the Christian all he or she needs to remain in the Faith through death into full eternal life. That is summed up in the exclamation of the widow of Zarepath which you have heard at least twice today:

And said the woman to Elijah, "Now I know thus: you are (a) man of Elohim, and (the) Word of YHWH in your mouth (is) Truth!"²

That Word of Truth this year opens the Sundays of endurance. She declares that she is enduring in the Faith, even in the face of the end. Annually, this sub-season of Trinity is heralded by the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels. One of the proclamations from that day that helps set the tone for these few weeks is the eternal reality that Satan has been cast out of heaven. The Commander of the Angels, the only

¹ *I Kings 17:24.*

² *I Kings 17:24.*

being to bear the title Archangel in the Scriptures, won the victory that means that Satan can no longer accuse the saints on earth before the Father in heaven. Oh yes, the deceiver roams the earth until the Last Day. He who is the “father of lies,” works his wiles to trap the faithful in unbelief, in the hope that they, you, will not endure in the Faith.

One of the most horrible tools in his arsenal he uses to tempt to “un-endurance” in the Faith is mortal death. The devil desires to work through the human emotions and thoughts that come with the death of loved ones in efforts to turn their mourning relatives to reject God’s grace and to despair of God’s mercy.

Against that, the texts for these weeks serve to allow our preachers to encourage the faithful in Christ into endurance in the Faith. For our benefit, for your comfort, the readings reveal God’s grace. That grace, and God’s mercy, we learn each year, are present even in the face of death. As God’s gifts continue to be proclaimed, the Word of Truth works for the good of the faithful. From that Word divided and administered rightly, as one Body in Christ, we learn that we might endure in the Faith to the end. And, we, you, are freed to share the fruits of your endurance in the Faith, even in the face of death. That is why you find yourselves calling upon, in various and sundry ways, the close relatives of those who have recently fallen asleep in the Lord.

Most of you will recall that this week’s Old Testament reading immediately follows the text historically appointed for last Sunday’s public proclamation of the

Word. You who heard it last week, studied it during the Men's Bible Study, and/or reviewed it in your homes, know that the Word then focused on God's grace and mercy which was revealed through an inexhaustible supply of foodstuffs in a widow's household in a time of famine.

It was in the same house in which God supplied food in a time of great worldly hardship that was brought on by Israel's unrepentance, that the events in today's record of death and resurrection took place. In modern terminology, we can call this the second installment of a grace and mercy biblical mini-series, one that teaches us endurance in the Faith of God the Life-giver. It is, as you heard today, also an event that foreshadowed greater miracles of resurrection that Jesus, in His role of Prophet, would perform. All of that having been said, you will remember that today's text actually begins after words like these from last Sunday:

(The) jar of the meal was not spent and (the) cruse of the oil did not fail, according to the Word of YHWH which He spoke through Elijah.³

It is an evangelical Bible interpretation principle that teaches that the context of Scripture passages is very important to developing a right understanding of the Word of God. From pastoral calls, I know that the vast majority of you who are here today spend time in the Word each week outside of the Divine Services. All of you who have taken our Adult Instruction class have learned essential ways in which the biblical meanings of texts are rightly discerned. Today, through a consecutive weekly Old

³ *I Kings 17:16.*

Testament reading, you are being reminded of the theological adage, “context will tell.” The setting of today’s text is framed by prophetic Word and the Word of prophecy fulfilled. It is through continually hearing such, that the Word of God keeps you enduring in the Faith, even when you have to face our last enemy – death.

Because we preachers are called to empower you with the Word for endurance in the Faith, for at least two decades this congregation’s members have been exhorted to read the Scriptures for each Sunday before and after each Divine Service. (How many of you do that)? To you who do not read them other than in the Lord’s service, know that you too are free to begin this healthful and helpful practice. In the texts for each week you will find life, and strength, and peace, and hope – they are the power of God for endurance in the Faith. That is one reason why they are listed in the columns usually on the back of the bulletin. If you are not spending time in the Word of God each day, repent, and receive the gifts. The busier your life is, the more time you should spend in God’s Word. We truly desire that you hold, in your hearts and minds, the context of the day’s texts, before and after you hear them. They are God’s gift that empowers you to endure in the Faith unto your last hour. You recall, in the end, they all lead you to Christ Jesus, and His victory over death that became your victory in Holy Baptism. (That is a subtheme for these weeks of Michaeltide – though some of you might say that it is a subtheme for my preaching every time. Well, Baptism is tangible Word)!

All this has been declared to lead you to recall that, from the setting in which this week's reading takes place, you may be better enabled to receive more of God's mercy and grace for repentant sinners than if this week's texts stood alone. Without hearing of God's love, grace, and care for the widow of Zarepath, her son, and the prophet, today's reading's beginning might actually lead you to fear God as a merciless, capricious, remote Being Who seems to delight in causing pain and sorrow.

The devil would surely enjoy taking today's narrative and turn it in your minds so that you might be tempted to not endure in the Faith. In other words, the deceiver would surely love to tempt you to behold God as the cause of death so that He might become the Savior of the dead. If the deception worked, if you believed that God was capricious and delighted in toying with His people, you would likely come to the conclusion that one cannot endure in the Faith unto the end, unless it was at the whim of God. There is an entire eighth century A.D. religion that holds to that kind of thinking - and it is in no way Christian.

You, dear Christian, know from your hearing and study of Scripture, that the will of God is that everyone would hear His Word and be saved from the results of sin - death, and hell, and the devil. Therefore, this day's texts flow from the revelation of the grace of God in providing oil and flour to the widow's household for several years. That Word of Truth empowers you to turn from deceptive thinking about God and His

works in today's readings. Hear again, in the context of God's grace and mercy, the opening words of today's second narrative of a two-part series:

And, it was, after these words, (the) son of the woman, (the) mistress in the house, became ill; and his illness was very severe until there was not left in him breath/soul/spirit.⁴

The installment begins, *and it was...* That indicates that some time had passed since the Lord's miraculous provision of food for the little household had begun. Elijah the prophet is still eating in the widow's table, and sleeping in an upper room of her house. The family continued to witness a daily miracle (the famine lasted three and a half years, yet the oil and flour was sufficient each day). Before that began, God had, through Elijah, told evil King Ahab that a long dry spell was coming on account of Israel's unrepentant sins.

The widow knew that Elijah was a prophet, not just from the mysterious miracle in her home, but from his words. Those words were again being proved to be the Word of God. It is the prophet's words which provide the key to her reaction to her son's death.

The son was truly dead, as the translation declared, *there was not left in him breath/soul/spirit*. Those last three words all may be used to translate one Hebrew word of the text. The way it is rendered here is to leave no doubt in your Christian mind

⁴ *1 Kings 17:17.*

that the widow's child was quite dead. She reacts to that in a way we all might understand.

Then she said to Elijah, "What (is this) to you and to me, O man of Elohim? Did you come to me to cause to bring to remembrance my sin, and to cause death to my son?"⁵

That, brothers and sisters in the Faith, is a confession of sins. This woman, who had been living for some time under God's gracious daily provision, beholds this death as God's punishment upon her for her sins. That means that she is remembering Elijah's preaching to be that of the Law! She is thinking and feeling convicted, condemned, and was experiencing death. That was so out of order.

People expect to die before their children. When the child dies first, parents often wonder what they might have done to have caused that suffering. That is the thinking of the natural man. Even the faithful may think like that at times such as this.

The widow's son's death, coupled with the end of the drought, famine, and miraculous supply of foodstuffs, might all together seem to be the work of a capricious, unpredictable god. In that era of history, such a young man would have been expected to be his widowed mother's normal human source of daily provisions. Why, that is even commanded by God in His Word. Now the son is gone, and his mother will be at a loss for her daily bread whenever the miraculous supply of oil and flour might end.

⁵ *1 Kings 17:18.*

When such things happen to Christians in our day, as the tribulations of this life overwhelm the miracles they have beheld, they at times exclaim, “What now? The hits just keep on coming! Why did God do this to me?” Was such the widow’s response to the death of the son, he who was expected to be her caregiver in her widowhood? It most certainly was, as she declared: *Did you come to me to cause to bring to remembrance my sin, and to cause death to my son?*

Dear ones who desire to endure in the Faith unto the end, her words reveal that she was really thinking about herself. She was not thinking that death comes to all people, even her son, on account of sin, including the sin in them. She was totally curved into herself in her grief – and she lashed out at the Word-bearer. At striking at the Word which was giving her life each day – she was driving nails into the Living Word!

Yes, just like you when you blame God, His Word, His message-bearers including His human angels (as some of you heard on Wednesday), she was driving death into the Word.

The Word is Christ Jesus – whom she did not then know by name – but would soon experience in action through Elijah. The inwardly turned woman was going to learn that all of this was all about God’s grace and mercy even in the face of death. She was feeling God’s wrath at her sins, and God was going to shower her with blessings? Our text declares:

And said [Elijah] to her, "Give to me your son." And he took him from her bosom and caused to carry him up to the upper chamber in which he dwelt. And he caused to lay him upon his bed.⁶

Elijah takes the uncleanness of death onto himself, into his very room, and contaminates his own bed. He renders himself unfit to enter into the Presence of the Living God. He does so in faith that God would take the uncleanness of death from him, from the house, from the child, from his mother. Elijah prays in enduring faith:

And he cried to the YHWH, "O my Elohe, has it (come) upon the widow which I sojourn, (that You) have caused to bring calamity to slay her son?" And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to YHWH and said, "YHWH, my Elohe, let (the) breath/soul/spirit of this child come again upon him."⁷

Elijah cries out, trusting in the God of mercy to take death's uncleanness, its sting, into Himself. He knew of the coming Messiah, for the Word God gave Him proclaimed that Coming One. He believed that God would, in the Person of the Christ, conquer death. God responded in His faithfulness to Elijah's enduring in the Faith:

And YHWH heard by (the) voice of Elijah and (the) breath/soul/spirit of the child came upon him, and he lived.⁸

The breath/soul/spirit that had departed was returned to the child. Wow! Here is a great reversal. From death came life... which is also a foreshadowing of that which God did through His only-begotten Son.

⁶ *1 Kings 17:19.*

⁷ *1 Kings 17:20-21.*

⁸ *1 Kings 17:22.*

From Jesus' death comes life to all, and to those who endure in the Faith, blessed life eternal. As Jesus' own mortal life neared its end, He in a greater fashion, ripped another widows' son from the cold grip of death, and presented him alive to his mother. This He will do for you mother's sons, you who are the sons and daughters of the Church, Christ's Bride, our mother, on the Last Day. We return to our text:

And Elijah took the child and caused to bring him from the upper chamber in the house, and delivered him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See you, he lives, your son!"⁹

God's gift of a living son and the prophet's Word of truth declare: "Your sins are forgiven!" The woman, whose Faith has been restored, declares the Word which endures forever:

And said the woman to Elijah, "Now I know thus: (a) man of Elohim you are, and (the) Word of YHWH in your mouth (is) Truth!"¹⁰

From that, in that Truth, I declare to you that which is given to keep you enduring in the Faith, even to the end:

the peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Trinity XVI (LSB One-year series)

Introit Psalm 86:1 (3,5); Psalm 30; I Kings 17:17-24; Ephesians 3:13-21; Luke 17:11-17

October 1, 2017

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

⁹ I Kings 17:23.

¹⁰ I Kings 17:24.

And, it was, after these words became ill son of the woman, mistress in the house; and it was, his illness, very severe until which not was left in him breath/soul.¹¹

Then she said to Elijah, "What to you and to me, O man of the Elohim? Did you come to me to cause to bring to remembrance my sin, and to cause death to my son?"¹²

And said he to her, "Give to me your son." And he took him from her bosom and caused to carry him up to the upper chamber in which he dwelt there. And he caused to lay him upon his bed.¹³

And he cried to the YHWH, "O my Elohe, has it upon the widow which I sojourn, has caused to bring calamity to slay her son?"¹⁴

And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to YHWH and said, "YHWH, my Elohe, let come again breath/soul of this child upon him."¹⁵

And YHWH heard by voice of Elijah and came breath/soul of the child upon him, and he lived.¹⁶

And took Elijah the child and caused to bring him from the upper chamber in the house, and delivered him to his mother, and Elijah said, "See you, he lives, your son!"¹⁷

And said the woman to Elijah, "Now I know thus, (a) man of Elohim you are, and Word of YHWH in your mouth (is) Truth!"¹⁸

¹¹ *I Kings 17:17.*

¹² *I Kings 17:18.*

¹³ *I Kings 17:19.*

¹⁴ *I Kings 17:20.*

¹⁵ *I Kings 17:21.*

¹⁶ *I Kings 17:22.*

¹⁷ *I Kings 17:23.*

¹⁸ *I Kings 17:24.*