

Sermon for September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

1 Kings 17:8-16

**8** Then the word of the LORD came to him, **9** “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” **10** So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” **11** And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” **12** And she said, “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 am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” **13** And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. **14** For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’” **15** And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. **16** The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Psalm 146

**1** Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

**2** I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

**3** Put not your trust in princes,

in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

**4** When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;

on that very day his plans perish.

**5** Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the LORD his God,

**6** who made heaven and earth,

the sea, and all that is in them,

who keeps faith forever;

**7** who executes justice for the oppressed,

who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

**8** the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

the LORD loves the righteous.

**9** The LORD watches over the sojourners;

he upholds the widow and the fatherless,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

**10** The LORD will reign forever,

your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the LORD!

Galatians 6:1-10

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5 For each will have to bear his own load. 6 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

#### Matthew 6:24-34

24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. 25 “Therefore I tell you, 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. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Our text for meditation this Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

Our reading begins with God speaking directly to Elijah the prophet, telling him to go to the Gentile territory of Zarephath and live with a poor widow. While many a sermon has been preached on the widow, on the faith she received from the Word of the Lord spoken, and the way that God provides for the needy, today I want to look just a bit deeper at Elijah himself and ask some questions about the office of prophet.

This is all the more necessary, since this very week a prediction regarding the “rapture” was proven to be false.<sup>1</sup> Some South African minister declared himself a prophet, declared he had a vision of Christ, and that the “Rapture” would happen on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September; no such thing happened. But men and women are doing this more often, having caught the prophet-envy bug. It seems that some people are feeling *envious* of the prophets, thinking of them as wizard-like figures who changed the world, the *top dogs* of the faith who deserve all this acclamation and praise. Having imbibed this idea that the prophetic experience is somehow more legitimate, mystical, or “spiritual” than the experience of any other believer, they say “I want that for me,” and rile themselves up. Sadly, they fall into all sorts

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1 <https://apnews.com/article/rapture-end-times-evangelical-christians-tiktok-e7d065520186503a6223ee12df1f02dd>

of delusions, thinking that being a prophet makes someone more special to God. Let us discuss why that isn't exactly the case.

## The Prophetic Experience

Before we begin, beloved is that you? Have you thought about the prophets wondered what it would be like to be one, or thought it must be nice to be in their shoes? We normal Christians can sometimes feel a burden when we consider how we trust in a God that we can't see with our eyes, while the prophets got to have all these big visions. We have to engage in apologetics and arguments to shore up our faith with evidence and reason, while the prophets got to work miracles. We operate on faith; the prophets operated on total certainty. We are cast down in the drudgery of having daily jobs and bearing contempt from nonbelievers every day, but the prophets are respected by billions of people. I believe that it is this sort of feeling of jealousy, if not resentment, that leads to so many deciding they have magical powers or mystic visions.

But the prophetic experience was not glamorous nor magical, beloved. They were not wizards – if anything, being a prophet was *painfully* mundane. The first verse in our passage says “Then the word of the LORD came to him.” How exactly did the Word come to him? Was it an audible voice ringing in his ear? Did an angel visit him? Did he just get a *funny feeling* like he was supposed to go to Zarephath, and he interpreted the physical-emotional stimulus, something normal people do not feel, so as to head to that Gentile territory?

Before dwelling further on such a question, we must recognize that the prophets already had the Word in the normal sense. The prophets of old were stewards of the Scriptures, at least the ones who arrived after Moses. Elijah heads to Zarephath after he predicts a drought in front of the wicked king Ahab. He says “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.”<sup>2</sup> That is not *just* a prophecy, beloved. Elijah was citing one of the covenant curses, which states that if the children of Israel are disobedient to His Law, then:

“ 22 The LORD will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat, and with **drought** and with blight and with mildew. They shall pursue you until you perish. 23 And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. 24 **The LORD will make the rain of your land powder.** From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.”<sup>3</sup>

You see beloved, in that moment Elijah was referring to that passage. Moses had made the previous prophecy, and the prophets who came after him were like attorneys for God. You can almost imagine Elijah if he were born today, wearing a cheap suit and reading glasses, declaring to the leaders of the nation: “Here, Israel, this is the stipulation which was in the contract, and you violated it. So in accordance with *this* stipulated consequence, drought shall be an affliction which you will bear until your nation is no longer able to take it. If at any time you should repent *during* this drought however, and return to covenant faithfulness under our Lord's Commandments, then this drought shall cease and rain will return promptly.”

Over and over again, the Old Testament prophets were these Covenant prosecutors, calling the people to task over their disobedience to the Law. In painstaking detail the prophetic author of the books of Kings details the prosperity of Israel under Solomon when he was faithful, and the way that he bankrupted Israel when he turned away from the Lord;<sup>4</sup> these were *both* foretold as conditions of obedience or disobedience to the Covenant.<sup>5</sup> Elisha the prophet does not bat an eye when the conditions of apostate Israel are so bad that they devolve into cannibalism of children,<sup>6</sup> for this too was a curse

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2 1 Kings 17:1

3 Deuteronomy 28:22-24

4 1 Kings 10:14-22, 9:10-14

5 Deuteronomy 28:12-14, 43-44

6 2 Kings 6:24-33

that God has spoken through the mouth of Moses should the Israelites continue to rebel.<sup>7</sup> This isn't just relegated to the books of the Kings, the same dynamic shows up in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and so so many more. The prophets were the Biblical scholars of their day, and Elijah was no different; much of their time was spent in study.

### **The Provision for Prophets**

So how did the Word of the Lord come to Elijah to tell him he must go to Zarephath? I can only conclude this: the man knew the Word by virtue of studying the Scriptures that he had available, and when God desired that he should have immediate direction, He brought about that the prophet *knew* what he must do. Certainly there were times when God spoke to him with an audible voice, just as our Lord did on the mountain as Elijah covered his face out of reverence.<sup>8</sup> We know that angels interacted with Elijah, as they did on the day he was taken up to Heaven.<sup>9</sup> But here, since Scripture does not mention voice nor angel, all we have left is the prophet suddenly *knowing*.

You see, most of the time God prefers to work through *means*. We receive the forgiveness of our sins through Baptism, Absolution, and through Communion. God provides us with our daily bread through our neighbors who grow food for us, and He makes us safe by providing us with police and our own means of protecting our lives. He extends our lifespan by raising up men to be doctors. And the Holy Spirit gives us the Word by means of the Scriptures. He speaks through every page of the Bible to us, using the plain meaning of the text to reach the souls of those who read it. He speaks through those who proclaim the message of the Scriptures to others. But with the prophets, He spoke to them *without* means of the Word, but having the same effect as when they studied the inspired books they had. Elijah knew that he had to go to Zarephath the same way he knew the contents of Deuteronomy. He could cite what God had put into his very soul and mind the same way he could cite the Scriptures to king Ahab and proclaim a drought.

Do you want to feel what it felt like for the prophets to receive a message from the Lord? Then read your Bible every day. Study it, cherish it, learn it like the back of your very hand, and you will have an internal knowledge of the Scriptures the way that the prophets had knowledge of God's messages. When you remember a Bible verse that is applicable to your life, that is how it felt for the prophet to receive a message from God most of the time. It was a much more mundane vocation than the modern would-be prophets would have you believe, and they often had day-jobs to provide for themselves. Amos the prophet spent most of his time farming,<sup>10</sup> Isaiah and Jeremiah were priests, and so forth. As it stands, visions were mostly a once-in-a-lifetime event for them.

### **The Purpose with Prophets**

Now, this is not me saying we should all act like the prophets, or that whenever we some funny feeling from a bit of bad food we should put on sackcloth and start condemning our leaders. Heaven forbid! Not every thought that comes into our heads is from the Holy Spirit. Beloved, you must realize that God's messages came with a *purpose*, something that accomplishes His *goals*. He told Elijah to go to Zarephath, because this accomplished the preservation of the widow and her son's lives with the flour and oil being extended. He told Elijah to go there knowing that he would convert souls to the true faith, and by the miracle of the flour the prophet would foretell a much greater miracle: when our Lord Christ multiplied bread and fish, feeding *thousands*. Elijah and men like him did not wait around for a funny feeling or a spontaneous thought; almost universally they simply related what the Scriptures meant for the people in the times they lived, and only performed their prophetic office, effectively, when God made them do so.

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7 Deuteronomy 28:52-57

8 1 Kings 19: 9-18

9 2 Kings 2

10 Amos 7:14-15

We are under no command to be Old Testament styled prophets today, for God accomplishes His purposes through us in a much more clear, much more advantageous way. Did not know beloved that by listening to and heeding the Word of God you *also* do great things? Did you know that you accomplish God's purposes when you trust in Christ for salvation, when you obey the Ten Commandments, when you pray? All these are taught to us in Scripture, and they are all great things which put us on the same level as the prophets when we do them.

I mean this. Here on earth there may be hierarchy between persons, but every one of us is justified by faith alone in Christ alone whether we are a plumber or a prophet. Yes, the prophets did a good work before God; so do Christian mothers when they raise their children well; so do Christian janitors when they do a good job at work. Elijah might have a distinct calling to do what he did, but he is not *special* in himself for having done it, he is not *superior* to a faithful believer who simply listens to the Word at Church and lives the Christian life. Let me put it more succinctly; you are not a second-class citizen in the Kingdom of God. God values you for who you are and your good works in your vocation no matter how mundane it is, just as much as He values a Hosea or a Zechariah.

How do I know this? Because with our reading it is clear that God valued a poor widow of Zarephath just as much as He valued Elijah. He preserved both of them through that famine, effectively sending Elijah to *serve* that widow and her son. Elijah does not demand that the widow bow down to him or call him “sir,” nor does he start barking orders at her that she respect and honor everything about him. Instead, because God sees her faithfulness and obedience as valuable, the prophet treats her honorably. May we then, instead of having “prophet envy” as so many have today, focus on humble faithfulness as well.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.