**The Lord Provides**

Based on [1 Kings 17:8-16](http://biblia.com/books/esv/1Ki17.8-16)

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Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

The Lord provides. Our Old Testament Reading for today is an account of the Prophet Elijah. In the days of Elijah, the people of Israel were guilty before the Lord. Their King, Ahab, “**Did evil in the sight of the Lord.**” And this evil was not theft or murder or adultery or slander. No doubt Ahab and the people of Israel were guilty of these things to a greater or lesser extent. But these sins are a symptom of a bigger problem, of a greater sin…the sin of idolatry.

It has become almost cliché in Christianity today to consider that all sins are equal before God, that the lord of heaven and earth doesn’t rank sins. He does. Because there is one sin that is at the root of all the others. It is the sin that you and I were guilty of the moment we were conceived in our mother’s womb and is at the source of our sinful nature. Idolatry. The most important commandment is this, “You shall have no other Gods.” And don’t just take my word for it, listen to Jesus who says in Matthew 22:37-38, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first *and greatest commandment***.”

In the Large Catechism of our Lutheran Confessions, Martin Luther writes, “**What does it mean to have a god? Or, what is a god? Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress**.” In other words, everyone has a god, be it money, prestige, success, or even seemingly more noble gods like family, or like peace. What do you fear more than anything? Is it conflict? Then peace is your god. What do you love more than anything? Is it family? Then family is your god. And if the true God--the maker of heaven and earth, the redeemer of all creation speaks a word that will bring division within a family--you will choose family over God. And so Jesus prepares us for this with his words in Matthew 10:34, “**Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.**” How can this be? Is God a home-wrecker? Well, yes. When you unite yourself with an idol, a false source of security and trust, God comes to break up that marriage, because he is a jealous God, and he not a swinger and doesn’t want to share you with anyone.

King Ahab had done evil in the sight of the lord, more evil than all the kings who were before him. He took a wife of the Sidonians who worshipped Baal and other false Gods. Her name was Jezebel, and on her account Ahab erected an altar of worship for Baal and Asherah. Happy wife, happy life? Perhaps Ahab thought so, but it's never that simple. God sent, Elijah the Tishbite prophesy to Ahab and tell him that because of this evil that he wrought in the eyes of the Lord, there would be a drought over the land. And so there was. And the drought affected not just Ahab, not just Jezebel, but the whole land.

Now you might be thinking this way about the way God sent punishment by a drought--that with it God was "painting with too broad a brush." If Ahab sinned, why didn’t God simply punish Ahab? If Jezebel sinned, why not just punish Jezebel? Why did God need punish the whole nation with a drought, such that even the faithful remnant had to suffer through it?

Two things. First, when God gave his people the promised land in the first place, He desired to be their king. But they were not content with God, and demanded a human king to represent them. In the end God gives people what they truly want; and so he gave them earthly kings, but also says that they will regret it. He says, “**When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day**.” In that day, Ahab was king only because the people, in their idolatry, had first rejected God as there king and all suffer because of it.

But second, and more importantly. God sent the drought so that, in the midst of it, God could provide. This is a teaching to take to heart, in the midst of feast or famine God provides. When we have plenty, we are lift up our voices in thanks to God for what he has given; when we are in need, we lift up our prayers in supplication, asking for God to give us what we need. And we know he will provide, because we have His word. Even in the days of Elijah, God's people had His Word in Deuternomy 31:6, “**Be strong and courageous. Do not be afreaid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your god goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you**.” He will not leave or forsake you. The Lord will provide.

Elijah was now on the lam and without food. He had spoken the Word of the Lord to Ahab and on account of it, was *persona non grata* in the land. When you "tell-off the king," you are biting the proverbial "hand that feeds you." Not a good play politically speaking. But faith knows that really it isn’t kings or princes or rulers that feed us...**it is the God of the universe, to whom all eyes look for their food at the proper time. The king of creation fills the hungry with good things and sends the wealthy away empty. It is the Lord of the heaven and earth who opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing.**

Ladies and gentlemen, God's alone is the hand that feeds you. If Elijah was worried about what he would eat or what he would drink or where he would lay his head tomorrow, he certainly wouldn't have spoken God’s Word to the cruel and powerful king Ahab. But Elijah remembered his Israelite catechism, and recalled the promise of Deuteronomy 8:3, “**Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” "**If I put off the word of God to pursue bread, I will have neither."

You see, there’s this temptation to think that--if only we get our worldly cares taken care of--only then can we turn our attention to keeping God’s commands. There is a sinful impulse to put God’s Word on hold until we sort out our worldly problems, then we can return to God’s Word, you know, when it’s more convenient or more politically advantageous and doesn’t cause problems. "**Wait until our kids are out of sports, then we can start worshipping together as a family**." Wait until my boss lets me have Sundays off, then I can congregate with the church. "Once we get this building paid off, then we can start preaching the law again." Imagine if Elijah waited until he had a nice nest egg set up before he spoke God’s Word to King Ahab. Well then, Elijah would certainly be regarded as wise in the eyes of the world, but he wouldn’t be a prophet of the most high God.

But the word of the Lord came to Elijah and he didn’t sit on it until a more opportune time. The devil is an oppourtunist, but not Elijah. He spoke it, trusted it, and let God look after the consequences. **You know, one of the most well known teachings of Jesus is ironically one of the most ignored.** Jesus says, “**Do not be anxious for tomorrow. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you.”** Seek ye first a comfortable home, a stable income? First get the kids through school and university? First pay off the mortgage and then kingdom of God will be added to you? Of course not. But that’s how we behave and that is idolatry.

But that’s not how our Lord promises to bless us. He blesses us through his Word, not apart from it. God says, "put my kingdom first, put my word first, and I will take care of your worldly needs." Elijah spoke the word of God and it threatened his livelihood. But God provides. **First God sent him to the brook Cherith, East of the Jordan River, and there sent ravens to feed him meat and bread. And in our reading today, God sent Elijah to a widow and her son who lived in the small coastal town of Zarephath *so that the widow would feed him*.**

Elijah he went as the Lord commanded him, and asked the widow for a morsel of bread; only she had none. Only some flour and oil in a jar, enough for one more meal for her and her son and then they would starve. Elijah says, "**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**. **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**." Imagine that; she has enough for one meal to feed her family, but what proves more important than feeding herself and her family is the promise of God. So she prepares the last of her food to give to Elijah, trusting that she will not starve, but the Lord will provide more...because he promised.

Now here is the thing to keep straight. According to our old selves it’s easy to hear me preaching this way. “Look at Elijah’s faith, be like Elijah.” Or “Look at the widows faith…follow her example.” You can’t just copy someone else's faith, it doesn’t work like that. The bible doesn't just give us an assortment of role models to imitate. There's no Gospel in that. The Gospel is in the promise. Had the widow given a stranger all her food at the expense of her family, she would have been no role model, for God tells parents to provide for their children. But she didn't. She gave prepared the last of her food for Elijah *because God promised to give her more*. God promised, "**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**."

Today’s lesson is not “be like Elijah” or "the widow", but rather, look at God’s promise and find your direction and assurance there, because you can trust it. God says that he will never leave you or forsake you. Believe it. God says, seek ye first the kingdom of God, and I’ll look after the rest, what a comfort! Elijah spoke the word of God to the widow at Zarapheth saying, "Feed me first, but don’t worry, God will provide food for you." It wasn’t her obedience that is to be praised, it’s the miracle that she actually believed God would provide. That assurance.

Does it take effort to believe the sun will rise in the morning. Is it hard work to believe that water will always flow downhill, or that falling asleep healthy you'll wake up in the morning? Then why would it take effort to believe a promise from the Almighty God who is Love and has the desire and power to deliver on each and every promise He makes?

In John chapter 20, Jesus said this to those first disciples who were ordained into the office of the Holy Ministry. “**He breathed on them and said, receive the holy spirit….If you forgive anyone his sins they are forgiven."** That's a promise from God. And so, When you confess your sins, and your pastor says, “Under orders of Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins.” Believe it. Believe it and be comforted. When you approach the altar and you hear the words, “**Take and drink, this is the true blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.**” Do not doubt, only believe. It is the promise that gives you faith, and makes you approved before God in heaven. He sent his son to die for you, and from that cross he gave up his Spirit sent to you in your baptism as a guarantee of your inheritance of eternal life. Believe it, because the Lord of heaven and earth provides.