

July 28, 2019
7th Sunday after Pentecost
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
The Lord Provides According to His Promises

1 Kings 17:1–16 (NIV84)

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”² Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah:³ “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan.⁴ You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.”⁵ So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there.⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.⁷ Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to him:⁹ “Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.”¹⁰ So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?”¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”¹² “As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”¹³ Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.”¹⁴ For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.’”¹⁵ She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.¹⁶ For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Lord brings his Word to three people in this account from 1 Kings 17 – to King Ahab, to Elijah and to the widow at Zarephath. As we look at these different promises we will see how the Lord provides according to his promises.

King Ahab had recently taken the throne in the northern kingdom of Israel. He was according to Scripture the worst king so far. One of his worst choices was marrying the daughter of the king of Sidon. Jezebel promoted the worship of Baal and Asherah in Israel to the exclusion of the worship of the Lord. Ahab goes along with his pagan wife. Now, Baal was supposedly the rain god. If you worshiped and sacrificed to him in the “right” way, which was usually in an immoral way, Baal was going to send rain at the proper time to make the crops grow. He and Asherah were supposedly in charge of making sure the sheep and goats had lots of baby sheep and goats so that the people would have plenty of crops and animals to provide for their needs. They were fertility gods.

Today there are many who look not to fertility gods, but to prosperity gods. They may even look to the one, true God but only to bring them prosperity in their bank account, business, health and life on this

earth. The one, true God has not promised this kind of prosperity to us. He had enough of the false worship of Baal and sent Elijah to announce that there would be no more rain. The Lord was going to show that Baal was nothing, had no power. This was a clear message to Ahab to repent because the rain stopped when Elijah announced this Word of God. The Lord took away what Ahab depended on to turn Ahab to the Lord. If you read the rest of Ahab's story you will see that he does not repent.

When something of this life is taken from you, do you turn to the Lord whose Word is always true? Maybe health is taken from you. Maybe a job is taken or the bank account is running low. Maybe a friend is no longer a friend or a family member moves far away. The something you depend on, the someone you depend on for this life is gone. Maybe this would be a time to turn to the Lord who never leaves or forsakes us. Maybe this is a time for the Lord to build our faith in him as he is the only one on whom we can depend. Ahab turns against the Lord during the famine. Let us always turn to the Lord who provides for us according to his promises.

The next promises God makes are to Elijah: *Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: ³ "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. ⁴ You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there." ⁵ So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. ⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.*

Drinking from a brook is a normal way for the Lord to provide for Elijah. However, being fed by ravens is not. Ravens don't generally share their food. Ravens were also considered unclean birds according to God's own law. It would be easy for Elijah to doubt this promise. Why would God use an unclean bird to feed me? Why would a raven ever come near me unless I was about to die? But Elijah trusts this unusual promise of the Lord and he drinks from the brook and receives bread and meat both morning and evening from the beaks of ravens. God provided as he promised.

Then God asks Elijah to believe another unusual promise: *Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.*

Elijah has declared spiritual war against Baal and now the Lord wants him to go to Sidon, the home country of wicked Queen Jezebel? The Lord is sending Elijah into the heart of Baal country to find a widow who will provide food for him? This is most unusual. Wouldn't it be easier to find a worshiper of the Lord in Israel? Or Elijah could go south into Judah where the temple of the Lord still stood in Jerusalem. Surely he would be safe there. But the Lord promises that a widow in Sidon will take care of him and he trusts the Lord's promise. Of course, the Lord provides for Elijah, just as he promised.

Sometimes we might look for the Lord to keep promises to us that he has not made. Why isn't my health improving? Why isn't that struggle getting easier? Why is this issue causing me pain in life? Why is God letting me suffer and struggle? Why isn't God providing what I need? But our Lord knows what we need far better than we do. If we accuse the Lord of not caring and not providing for us as we think he should, then we need to repent for we are trying to hold the Lord to promises he has not made.

Other times we may not understand the method in which God provides for us. He provides for Elijah

with unclean ravens and a poor widow in the middle of Baal country. The Lord has provided forgiveness for all people in a most unusual way. God sends his Son to be born of a virgin. This does not happen, except that it did happen. Jesus, the Son of God, suffers and dies in the place of those who have sinned against him. Christ Jesus offers himself as the payment for the sins of the world which hated him. We sacrifice for friends, for family, for the innocent and the deserving, but not for enemies. By nature we think that there must be something I can do to earn my salvation, but the Lord tells us that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

When we are burdened by our sin and guilt, by our active rebellion against the Lord and our doubts about his care for us, he urges us to look to Jesus. Look to the suffering servant, the one nailed to the cross, the one whose blood was shed, the one buried in the tomb. That is how God provided forgiveness. That is how God provides what we need most.

When Elijah gets to Zarephath, he meets a poor widow who thinks she and her son will soon die because she only has enough flour and oil to make one more cake of bread. The Lord gives her an amazing promise: *Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son."*¹⁴ *For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'*¹⁵ *She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.*¹⁶ *For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.*

Again, the Lord made a specific promise to provide and kept his promise to provide. The insignificant amount of flour and oil brought great blessings to Elijah, the widow and her son – food for the duration of the famine which preserved their lives.

Today, many of you will receive a small piece of bread and a very little wine. It is not enough to sustain you physically for long. It is insignificant in the eyes of the world. But God has attached a promise to the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Jesus says that the bread you receive is also his body and the bread is at the same time his blood. Jesus promises forgiveness to those who receive his body and blood in this sacrament. Eternal blessings are provided by God by his promise connected with the bread and wine.

The Lord provides for us according to his promises. Sometimes he may bless us by taking something away. Sometimes he provides for us in unusual ways. Sometimes he provides great blessings from normal things. But he always provides through his promises. Keep listening and trusting in the God who provides our daily bread for this life and forgiveness for eternal life.

Amen.