



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

June 17, 2007

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 17:17-24

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 1 Kings 17:17-24

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 30

Second Lesson: Galatians 1:11-24

Gospel: Luke 7:11-17

The Word of the Lord is Truth

Pilate once said, "What is truth?" In a movie, a character portrayed by Jack Nicholson said, "You can't handle the truth." The truth is something we always seem to be concerned about in some way, shape or form. Maybe sometimes we use the truth as a way of exerting power by withholding the truth from someone that they need to know so that we have some power over them.

Power is also something we are concerned about. Today (Father's Day) is probably the one day of the year when you fathers actually have the power to decide where to eat lunch, right? But power isn't just for insignificant things like deciding where to eat lunch.

Today we are reminded of an incredible truth that the Word of God has a truth that has a power that goes beyond our understanding. The other thing we probably can see and we probably know but we need to be reminded of over and over again is that in that Word of God, we find a truth that has a power that we desperately need in our daily lives. It isn't a truth that is just a nebulous fact that is out there and "so what," but it is a living power that comes from God—the truth of his Word.

This widow of Zarephath learned that through a great tragedy. She saw that the word of Elijah, God's prophet, was true and she rejoiced in it, but it is something that she probably already knew. She needed to be reminded of it again.

Think of how often that is true for you and me. We know the truth and yet, so often, we still need to hear that same simple truth to lead us back, to ground us in that simple truth of God's love for us in Christ, because that is where we find the truth that has the power over death and the truth that is a necessary power in our lives.

This account of the widow of Zarephath and Elijah is probably familiar to us. It is probably something you might have learned in Sunday School or Grade School. Do you remember the setting where all this takes place? Elijah was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom. The King at this time was Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, and they were pretty wicked. They wanted nothing to do with God. They were trying to kill the prophets of God, so God had sent drought on the land and they were in the middle of that drought, and there was famine in the land. So God sent him outside of the children of Israel, first of all to the Kerith Ravine where ravens fed him and next to this widow of Zarephath. There were plenty of widows in Israel at the time of Elijah, but God sent him outside of Israel to this place because the Israelites had turned their back on the power that is the truth of God's Word.

When he came there, he found this widow, and she was about to make her last meal—at least that is how she viewed it. Do you remember that? She was putting together the bread and the flour and the oil and was going to make her last meal and, I guess, go sit down somewhere and just wait to starve to death because there was famine and she was at the bottom of the bowls. Elijah says, “Make a meal for me.” She says, “We are about to die. We don’t have anything else. There isn’t even enough for the two of us, but because you say so” she did it. She evidently viewed Elijah as a man of God, a man who spoke the truth of God, and she did it, and lo and behold, everyday when she got up again there was flour and there was oil even though she didn’t run down to the convenience store to get more. God provided for her in a miraculous way, and he kept her son alive and her alive and Elijah alive.

Sometimes the incredible blessings that God gives to us begin to be taken for granted, don’t they? We are blessed by God to have a place like this where we can worship together. We are blessed to have fellow believers encourage us and sometimes we take them for granted. Evidently, maybe that happened to a point, or at least it came to the point that something worse happened and then our eyes get filled up with the worst thing and our sinful nature leads us to say, “God how could you? Why would you? What is wrong with you?” That is what this widow says when her son dies. She says it by lashing out at God’s representative, Elijah. “Did you just come here to remind me of my sin and kill my son? Did you just come here so that God would see what a terrible person I am and instead of forgiving me as I believed, now he is punishing me because I am evil?”

In the midst of our hurts and in the midst of our pain as we go through it in life, the things that bring us pain—whether it’s the loss of a loved one, whether it’s the loss of a job, whether it’s the loss of a relationship, or whether it’s just the worry and uncertainty that comes with “what are we going to do next?”—the devil is certainly going to lead us to want to say, “God, where are you? Why are you letting this happen? Don’t you love me? You said you are a God of love and look at what you are doing in my life.” Our sinful nature is going to want to scream that at times and maybe at times our sinful nature even gets a hold of our vocal chords and we say it to one another. In the midst of those times we need to refocus our vision off of what troubles us and to the promises God has made to us.

Elijah evidently endures the verbal abuse and then just says, “Give me your son.” And then he takes the son upstairs and prays to the Lord and calls on the name of the Lord and the Lord, in his grace and in his mercy, does what he has not promised us to do. He has not promised us that he will extend our life. He has not promised us that he will bring them back when a loved one dies. But in this case he did so that this woman would see that God’s Word is truth and has power and so that you and I would see that God’s Word is truth and it has power even over death. In this case it has power over physical death. But in your case and in my case as we sit here today, God’s Word has power over spiritual death because when you and I are born into this world, we are as dead as can be. We are lost and condemned creatures. We have nothing to offer to God—nothing that we can say to him, “You owe us something God. If you want

evidence of it, just look back over the day, the week, I'm betting you don't have to go much farther than the day though."

Did you have any problems getting ready this morning? Did you have to give the kids a good boot in the rear end to get them moving because, "Do we have to go to church again?" We are sinners. We are spiritually dead and it shows up in our lives day after day after day. But when we come here, we hear of a God who loves us and has taken away our sins. We are reminded that we are forgiven and that we stand perfect in God's eyes—not because we made the supreme effort and actually got here to church—because Christ lived in our place and died in our place. That brings us from spiritual death to spiritual life. That gives us the power also to know that when we die physically, we go to be with the Lord. We go to a place that is better by far, as Paul once said. We go to be where there is no more suffering, no more sorrow and no more tears. We go to be in the place where God himself is the light at the center of our universe. We go to be with the Lord in our eternal home where perfection is the norm. So God's Word even has the power to defeat physical death because he gives us eternal life.

But now, think of how this Word of truth that has this power is important for us in our daily lives. This woman now says, "You know what? I was wrong. I doubted God. I attacked you, Elijah, but now I know the truth. You are a man of God and what you have said is true and my God does love me and my God is with me and my God will continue to be with me no matter what I might face in this life." This woman confesses her trust and her faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the God who saved her and the God who has saved us.

As you and I go through life and as we struggle with various things, we have a power that is there at our side at all times. It's a power that we can tap into, that we can plug into as we make use of the gospel in our daily lives. When we see how often we have failed our God and we hear our God say, "I love you and I have taken your sins," it's not now, "Well I guess I have to do these things." It's "I get to and I want to know God better. I want to grow in that knowledge. I want to know who he is and what he has done for me." The more we feed that hunger to know God better that is inside of us as Christians, the more power we have in life to face the difficult things, to face the things that worry us and trouble us. We can face them because we know that we're not facing them alone. Whether my head is on the pillow in a hospital room, I know my God is at my side. Whether my head is on a pillow that is now alone because I have been left alone, I know that my God is with me and he is at my side. That is the power that is in the Word of God. That power is not just pie in the sky. It's not just something that is out there. It is something that is real that takes root in our lives and changes us.

I get to see it all the time as a pastor as I teach. I teach people and take them through classes. I see the change. I see the eyes, the light come on, the switch goes off and I see the comfort and peace and hear them talk about it. It's amazing to me. And yet I see it time and time again. We talked about it last Sunday night in our New Life in Christ class as we talked about the value of continuous study of God's Word, and I asked the people that were there, "Can you see this?" They have been experiencing it week after week.

As we stay connected to God's love for us in Christ through Word and Sacrament, God has a power for us that goes beyond any power. And the thing about this power is that the price of it doesn't go up and down like the price of gas fluctuates. It remains the same. It is free to you and me. Christ has paid the entire price. Now the cost to you and me is the time to know a God who loves us so intensely and so perfectly. That's not a cost at all. That's a joy. That's a blessing. That's a privilege.

The Word of the Lord is a truth that has incredible power, so plug into it.