



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

June 9, 2013

Pentecost 3

Sermon Text: [1 Kings 17:17-24](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [1 Kings 17:17-24](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 30](#)

Second Lesson: [Philippians 1:18b-26](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 7:11-17](#)

What Do You Know?

Doubt in the face of death

Joy in God's gift of life

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Did you ever notice how the same phrase can have different meanings depending on who is saying it and the body language they are using and when it's being said? For instance, if you have a couple of siblings together and they are doing almost anything together and the phrase "What do you know" comes up, it's probably not a good thing. It probably means they are fighting about something and they are telling the other one they aren't as smart as they think they are. But that same phrase, "What do you know," can be a friendly greeting when you see someone. "Hey Frank. What do you know?" Sometimes it's simply what it is. If you are struggling with something and you go to someone else and say "What do you know about this," that's saying you need help.

What do you know in the face of death? That's what our readings bring us today. In this First Lesson, we meet a widow who had come to know God's power intimately. Yet, it becomes clear as we look at what happened that what she knew in the face of death was doubt and uncertainty. Then we also see how the Lord, in his wisdom, gave her son the gift of life so that she found joy. So we have to ask ourselves, what about us today, and think about that as we look at these words from 1 Kings this morning.

It says in the beginning there, "Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill." This is a woman that you know. It's the widow at Zarephath. Elijah was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the kingdom that never had godly kings. He had a tough, tough ministry. It got to the point where God said, "Pray that there won't be any rain in the land," and Elijah prayed. There was no rain in the land. During that time, God sent Elijah to live by a little brook. He had food delivered every day, and it wasn't Jimmy John's. It was ravens bringing him food, every day. Eventually the brook runs dry. So then God sends him to this widow at Zarephath. Zarephath is not a city of the children of Israel. It's outside the children of Israel. In fact, Jesus talks about this when he says to the people of his hometown who were rejecting him, "Don't you know that in the time of Elijah, there were plenty of widows in Israel and yet Elijah was not sent by God to any of them. He was sent to that pagan

widow, that widow from a pagan people from outside of the children of Israel, that Gentile.” It’s a way of saying God is often rejected by his people, so he goes then with his love and his mercy to others.

If you remember the account of this widow of Zarephath, you remember how she is there picking up sticks, not because it’s Arbor Day but because she is going to cook her last meal and then die because they are out of oil and out of flour. This is it. She’s going to bake that last loaf of bread and then just wait around to die. Not exactly a fun to-do list. Elijah comes to her with this unusual request. “Pick up your sticks, make that bread and serve me first.” That’s kind of forward and bold, isn’t it? Then he says, “God will take care of you.”

Then what happened is that day after day, they get up the next morning, and there is more flour and more oil. Day after day the Lord does this miracle to sustain this woman and her son.

Did you ever read this account and ask yourself, “I wonder how many days until they looked down and said, ‘Oil and flour again?’” Here is God taking care of their needs in this miraculous way, but it’s the same thing day after day. You know how we all at times get less than content with how the Lord provides for us? Just like the children of Israel, manna again? Quail again? Bread, flour again? But day after day, as she sees people around her starving, she is delivered by the hand of God. And she’s there taking care of this man of God who she clearly says he is, a man of God, a prophet. She knows the prophet. You have to believe they had time to talk. In fact, she even identifies the God whom Elijah serves as “the Lord.” She talked about the “word of the Lord from your mouth.”

The covenant God. The God of full and faithful grace. The God who does not treat people as their sins deserve, but he makes and keeps these promises, like he made to Abraham, that all nations on earth would be blessed through Abraham even though all nations don’t deserve it. So you would have to think she knew who God was. She enjoyed his blessings and his power day after day, but now, when her son dies, doubt comes in.

“What do you have against me, man of God?” It’s an interesting way they translate it. That could be what it means. It literally just says, “What is there to me and to you?” It’s almost like she’s saying, “Why did you even come here?” Now the pain was trumping the miracles that had kept her alive this long, that had fed her. Now the pain and the hurt and the loss was trumping everything and she was asking “What in the world are you doing here Elijah?” She said, “Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?” Literally it just said, “Did you come to bring to mind sin and kill my son?” “Bring to mind,” it doesn’t say who. To remind “me” is how they translated it. It could be she’s thinking, “Did you come to remind God of my sin, because God is doing these things for me and now God sees who I am and what I am, and now he’s letting me have it because I’m a sinner.” Sometimes people might attack this and say this is obviously a pagan idea that you are punished for your sin and death comes, but it’s one we all

struggle with at one time or another I think. I think the one thing you could say to the credit of this woman is something that many people don't understand today...all death is related to sin. If there had never been sin, there wouldn't have been death. Today we just want to talk about the circle of life in society and watch animated lions sing and things like that and try to do away with this connection between death and sin. But she recognized it. She wasn't quite correct here, but when you are hurting, all kinds of thoughts can rush into your head.

That doubt does not seem to be limited only to this woman. The man of God also seems to be saying, "God, what in the world are you doing?" That's how we all are, right? What in the world does God do at times? We can't understand it. He's God. We're not. There are so many things we can't understand, the idea that we can understand God is beyond our abilities.

Elijah says, "Give me your son" and he goes upstairs and lays him on the bed and says, "O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" The man of God knows that our times are in God's hands. God is the one who knows the day of our death before we are even born. He isn't saying "did you" as much as he is saying "God, why did you let this happen? Here is this woman, she's maybe an infant in faith. She's growing in faith, and she sees your power and your love and your mercy, and now you've brought this on her? What are you doing Lord?" Understandable.

God has a plan that is bigger than us and he sees more than us, and his plan in this case was to show that he has power over death. His plan was not to torment them or create doubt in their minds. It was to lead them to see that God is the God of life and death and God is the God of mercy who has power over death.

When Elijah cries out, God gives back the life of this son and gives him back to his mother. We think, "Isn't that wonderful." For Elijah and the woman, it certainly was wonderful, wasn't it? Did you ever stop and ask yourself, "What about the son?" If I drop dead of a heart attack before this sermon ends, don't come and ask God to send me back down from heaven. I want to stay there because that's the goal of our faith, right? God, in his wisdom, sent this son back because he wanted to teach us and this woman something. What he teaches us is that he is a God who has power over death. We see that and we know that in the life of Jesus, the first fruit of those who have fallen asleep.

God sent Jesus to live in your place and my place, to live perfectly under the Law because we can't and we won't and we don't. Yet God demands that perfection of us, so Jesus did it. He did it for us, in our place. Love and mercy to the nth degree. He did it in our place while we were his enemies. Then he took all of our sins, carried them to the cross, and died with our sins on his back. Then because the wages of sin is death, he was put in the tomb. But because he won the victory and paid for all his sins, the tomb was thrown open and Jesus rose and appeared to his followers and said, "I won the victory." Satan has been defeated. The power of death is sin. The power of

sin is the Law. But thanks be to God, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' resurrection from the dead assures us that we all will rise from the dead on the last day. Jesus' resurrection from the dead assures us that even though we die, yet we shall live, as Jesus once said.

He tells us the victory is ours. We see that he has power over death in the raising of the widow of Nain's son and the widow of Zarephath's son. But we might ask this question. This might come to our minds. Why those two? Why not my loved one? Why not my pain eased when I have lost a loved one? I'll tell you what I've told people over and over again. I don't know. God does what God does. But what you and I need to know is that he loves us no matter what he does. His love took away our sin and gave us eternal life the moment he gave us the gift of faith. That is much more precious than the physical life he restored to those two young men. He's given us heaven, and whenever we die, that's where we're going.

Yeah, we might have doubt in the face of death. God, why? God, how? But when we have those questions that we can't answer, let's go back to the ones we can answer. We have a joy that passes all understanding, a joy that isn't just a giddy happiness, a joy that trusts that God has given the gift of life to his people and that those who die in the Lord are with the Lord. That's what we want to know in the face of death. That's what God in his Spirit has enabled us to know in the face of death. That's what he wants us to remind each other of in the face of death. That's why God puts the lonely together in families so that we can comfort and encourage one another with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. It's really a joy that we get to do it, so let's do it. Let's not just say that someone is in a better place. Let's say that better place is heaven because Jesus lived and died in their place. Let's not say we'll meet again. Let's say we'll meet again, but we too will see Jesus face to face and our loved one is now seeing Jesus face to face. Let's use that Gospel message to comfort one another. That's what our God has given us.

This widow learned that the Word of the Lord from Elijah's mouth was the truth. The Word of the Lord that is in all of Scripture is the same for us. It is the truth. That's what we want to use to comfort and encourage one another, so the greatest thing you and I could know is the Word of God. The greatest thing that you and I could share is the Word of our God. A word of peace, a word of comfort, a word of confidence that it all depends on Jesus and not upon us. Know that. Amen.