

This week's story takes place about 100 years after King David's reign and after the kingdom splits in two. King Ahab rules the Northern Kingdom. From modern archeology we know Ahab is one of the most successful and powerful kings of Israel and from scripture (1 Kings 16:29ff) we know he is one of the most wicked kings. Ahab married Jezebel from #Sidon. She brings with her new gods and Ahab begins to worship both Yahweh and Baal and other gods. This in general is bad, it breaks the first commandment but, at the end of chapter 16, Ahab has a service to dedicate the new wall built around Jericho and sacrifices two humans as part of a worship.

God has a lot of great qualities but two main traits: #Faithfulness and Justice. What do you think human sacrifices in the name of worship stirs Yahweh to do? God seeks change. God seeks reform. In comes Elijah the reformer, protesting that the religious direction of the country has gone wrong. 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." God sends the reformer Elijah speak words of truth to the powerful. Ahab and Jezebel are powerful and ruthless, so after Elijah says the truth God sends him to the # Wadi Cherith for his safety (this is just north of Elijah's home town, Tishbe). In this wild valley that some times has water in it draining to the Jordan, God provides for Elijah using a raven to bring him food and the stream, for water. When the wadi dries up God sends Elijah to Sidon. Who is from Sidon? Jezebel.

So Elijah travels from the Wadi Cherith, about 60 miles, to Zarephath. Think about that Elijah walked 60 miles

during an extreme drought, while topping Ahab's most wanted list? Elijah arrives at Zarephath and there is a widow at the city gate. He asks her for water. She brings it. Then he asks for a little bread to eat. There is a great drought in the land, all of the people are suffering the widow is no different. So when Elijah asks for bread she says, "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; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." This is language of scarcity—a little flour, a little oil—this is the last desperate act of a woman that knows there is nothing left. But Elijah, foreign reformer, tells her a different story, not a story of scarcity but a story of promise. He says, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." The Lord will provide. Even in this land of Jezebel God will provide—for the widow, for her child and for God's reformer Elijah.

I'm struck by the widow; she trusts the promise. The promises of God stand at the center of the story. This story about the work of the Living God. This is what the Bible is about, Jesus is about—the shared witness in, participation in, life in the Living God; that is faithful, God's keeps God's promises.

Martin Luther's question as he left his law career and entered the monastery was, "Where can I find a gracious

God?" This question is foundational for the reformation and this story. God called Elijah into service and his life doesn't get any easier. Elijah might ask, "where can I find a gracious God." And he finds God or rather God finds him in the wilderness. God sustains Elijah with a bit of bread and meat. Where can the widow find a gracious God? It certainly wasn't in manna from heaven. The widow meets the gracious God in this wondrous provision, in a promise that is realized one day at a time. The God who is gracious finds people in the wilderness, in their poverty, in their emptiness.

We are here this morning commemorating the 499 anniversary of the beginning of the reformation, kicking off the 500th year celebrations. We are hear this morning reading the story of Elijah the reformer and the faithful widow from Zarephath. We are hear celebrating our six weeks of water and vocation that raised money for and awareness about access to safe water around the world and our 5k is a milestone on that journey. We are hear also kicking off our Stewardship drive with the theme verse from #1 Peter 4, "Be generous with the different gifts God gave you." This verse is a great definition of stewardship. God has given us everything we have: food, clothing, home, family, everything we need for our daily lives. It is from these gifts that we give back to God. Yes, there is a real sense that our money makes the ministries at Peace Lutheran happen that foster faith and our generosity is at work creating justice around water in our partnership with the ELCA and childcare in our emerging partnership with Bloom Early Learning and Childcare. And there is also a real sense that our giving is for us. God commands that we give and all of God's commands

are about preserving and making lives better. God knows that there is a need within us to give; God knows that generosity gives us better lives. God commands us to give. We give because there are needs and because we need to give.

Over the next four weeks of the stewardship drive we will hear more about generosity and giving. Next Sunday we will see the videos the youth are preparing, where they record people answering the question, #“When have you experienced generosity?” The following week you will receive a mailing with stories about Peace's generosity over the years and stories of individuals living faithful lives. On Sunday November 13 Lance Novak, the Treasurer, will talk to us about Peace's current finances and the 2017 budget and after worship we will have a conversation about Peace's on going generosity with our Bloom partnership. Finally on November 20 during worship we will bring our pledge cards; they help Peace create a budget but more importantly they allow us to make a commitment to ourselves and God about the finical generosity we seek to live out in the coming year.

All of this is grounded in the fact that the promises of God stand at the center of our story. The Living God is active in our lives. This is what the Bible is about, Jesus is about—we witness to, we participate in, the life of the Living God—that is and always will be faithful.