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The Episcopal Church of St. Benedict
Proper 5 – June 6, 2010
1 Kings 17:8-24

Welcome to Summer 2010 – the Summer of the Prophets!

Every week this summer, and into the fall actually, we're going to be reading scripture from the prophets of the Old Testament.

We'll read about Elijah and Elisha in June.

Then we'll start reading Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Isaiah.

Summer is supposed to be a carefree time, when we enjoy warm weather, graduations, vacation, barbequing, the Feast of St. Benedict, a little NASCAR, some baseball, some basketball, and even some hockey (who knew, right?).

This summer in church, we're going to be hanging with the prophets: kind of a straggling group of guys who you probably wouldn't exactly enjoy having over for a cookout.

But God called so many of them... God likes prophets, and still does. People who trouble us and make us uncomfortable, and yet push us toward the pressing issues of our time.

I think of Abraham Lincoln, Dorothy Day, Malcolm X, Gene Robinson, those flotillas of relief supplies that people keep trying to dock at Gaza, the pelicans and fish who keep washing up dead on the shores of the Gulf.

They are all prophets, I think, who God has sent us to tell us some part of the truth of what's happening around us...

God doesn't want to strip us of our wonderful summer days, but God wants us to remember the people we may have forgotten. And the pelicans and fish, too!

And God wants to remind us about how God's power works, because it's not like human power – on Wall Street or a hockey rink or maybe even in our own homes.

Let's spend some time with the story of "Elijah and the widow of Zarephath"...

(Doesn't that sound like a terrific novel or movie title?!?)

Elijah's job, while he's on earth, is to be a thorn in the side of a King named Ahab and his wife, Jezebel.

Ahab and Jezebel are very very very bad people. More on them next week (or, if you're dying to read their entire sleazy story, turn to the last 6 chapters of 1 Kings in your Bible).

When we join Elijah in today's story, he's just told Ahab that there's going to be a terrible drought and it's not going to rain until Elijah says so.

Wisely, perhaps, God suggests that Elijah get out of town for a while.

He goes to a Gentile town, Zarephath, and God assures him that a widow there will feed him.

Now, this would be like if God said to you, "a homeless single mother will make sure you get everything you need to eat." Oh, and she's a different religion than you are.

This is a woman who is barely feeding herself and her child, who is barely scraping by, she and Elijah have pretty much nothing in common – and she's going to feed him?

She's pretty surprised, too. Even offended. She says to him:

As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal 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."

Whew!

But even today, many of us, too, tend to believe we have nothing to offer other people when we feel like we don't even have enough for ourselves.

And who among us would ever look for support or sustenance from a person who had so little? That seems rude and even exploitative. But that's where God sends the prophet Elijah: to a woman and her son who have nothing.

And of course, there's the miracle: the handful of meal and the tiny bit of oil fed them all, and lasts for days.

In this story, Elijah the prophet shows us not to be afraid of having too little.

Because God can take what seems like nothing and make it into something powerful.

It's not magic – it's not hocus pocus. It's the real power of faith over fear.

And Elijah gets pushed just a little bit on this when the unexpected happens and the widow's son dies. Through faith, he's saved this boy from starvation and all for nothing?

Elijah listens to God, Elijah follows God's call and God's instructions;

and then, it's Elijah who asks God for something. And God listens to Elijah's voice.

And the miracle comes because there is a conversation going on.

That's where the real power is: in the conversation between God and humanity.

Not God acting alone, and not human beings acting alone.

But in a meeting place; in dialogue.

Where are the places where God and human beings have conversations? Anywhere, of course, but also we hope, in church, in worship, and in Christian fellowship.

And where else does a tiny bit of meal become a feast? At the altar, in the Eucharist.

Where else can a dab of oil become great sustenance? When people anoint each other for healing and strength.

What happens when prophets overcome their fear and act in faith, even though there's so much to be afraid of?

These are trying times, when faith is tested and fear is real and abundant.

But choosing faith over fear is always hard. Believing that God can take something seems like so little and make it into something powerful is always counter-intuitive and counter-cultural.

But that is God's way – in Elijah, in Jesus, in the Apostle Paul, and in us.

Amen.