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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

September 17, 2023

Text: Matthew 6:24–34

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The anxieties and cares of the widow of Zarephath were understandable (I Kings 17:8–16). She and her son had one meal left to eat, a last supper of simple bread. In her mind, a final loaf of bread would constitute the table fellowship she and her son would celebrate before their death. After that simple feast, both would starve to death bringing their mortal lives to a bitter end. Such were the anxieties and cares of a widow and her son in the country of Sidon, north of Israel.

The widow's supper plans were interrupted by Elijah the prophet; he asked her to provide him with water and bread to eat as he entered the city. The Lord had sent Elijah to go to this region with a command and promise, "Arise, go to Zarephath...Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you" (I Kgs. 17:9). Elijah was thirsty and hungry because there was a drought and famine in Israel to the south. Through Elijah, the Lord was chastising Israel and Ahab, her wicked king. No rain would grace the land of Israel until Elijah said otherwise. No rain, no crops, no food.

That righteous servant of the Lord, Elijah, obeyed God's command. And he suffered too. It is true. Sometimes, the righteous suffer because of and alongside the wicked. King Solomon wrote in the Proverbs 14:34, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." Elijah and all the remnant of faithful believers in the land of Israel had to bear the reproach of their evil king and others who had abandoned the path of faith and righteousness. The same suffering has been experienced by God's people throughout the centuries in all lands, nations, and countries. Our day is no different. We pray the Lord will exalt our nation, not so much in economic,

military, or political power, but in Christian righteousness. May the Lord God grant us the greatest gift: the freedom of the Gospel preached mightily so that our land may be filled with Christian believers who hear God's Word and live faithful, godly lives in private and public. May God the Father grant our nation the righteousness of Christian faith, the justification of sinners who believe the Gospel, receive Holy Baptism, and gather together in churches to hear God's Word, pray, and receive Christ's body and blood knowing they live and die in the hope of the resurrection of the just. Even if our nation follows the path of sin and shame, which is her current path, then we Christians will live faithfully day by day in repentance and faith knowing that God in Christ stands with us and for unto eternal life.

That widow of Zarephath had plenty of anxieties with starvation for her and her son staring them in the face. And this prophet from Israel wants to take her last meal! But Elijah had a very specific word of command and promise meant for her alone. "The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth" (vs. 14). That's a great promise. But faith in that promise must come first, demonstrated with obedience to the prophetic word. Make the cake for Elijah, then make some for you and your son. The flour and oil won't run out. But make it for Elijah first. Thus, she and her household were sustained according to God's Word.

This Old Testament reading reminds us that God provides for His people. We New Testament Christians do not have a specific, divine promise that says our kitchen cupboards will never run out of oil and flour. But we do have promises from the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, that God will never forsake His people. In Psalm 37:25, King David wrote:

<sup>25</sup>I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.

Such holy confidence comes from the goodness of the Lord. And yet, the Lord Jesus gives us an even more sure word of confidence and strength. In

the Gospel reading from Matthew 6, commands us to not be anxious about food, drink, clothing, or the things of life in general (vs. 25–31). Don't worry about these temporal, earthly things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them. Jesus illustrated His teaching with vivid, easily memorable lessons. In essence, Jesus said we need to go outside. Vs. 26, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" Of course, you are! Birds are wonderful creations of God. But they were not created in His image like you are. Will He not provide for those made in His image? Absolutely.

Then Jesus points to another lesson from the natural world. Vs. 28–30, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arranged like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" As you all know, those beautiful flowers last only so long. They are temporary. You, however, are immortal. The Lord God created you with eternity embedded deeply in your heart and soul. If our Lord clothes the flowers with a beauty that last but a few days, will He not clothe you whom He created to spend eternity with Him and the heavenly hosts? Absolutely.

Jesus says twice, "Do not be anxious." (Vs. 25, 34). Do not be anxious about the very necessary things of this life. For "your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (vs. 32).

The Lord presents us with two alternatives to a simple, unchangeable truth: we human beings live under the rule of someone else. The idea that man can be his own source of authority is pure fiction. We either serve God the Holy Trinity in Christian faith leading to righteousness and ultimate glory. Or we serve the false god of money, really the devil himself, with its promise that it will deliver us from anxiety and death. Listen again to vs. 24, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." Every human being serves a master. The question become which

master we serve: the living God of heaven and earth, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Or the god of this fallen world, the devil, who seeks to enslave everyone with the fear of death.

Answering the ultimate question of whom you serve is not as straightforward as we might think. The sinful nature we received at conception and the sins of thoughts, word, and deed we have committed ever since make it impossible for us to choose rightly. We need a Savior who will not only provide for our earthly needs of food, clothing, house and home, but our eternal need for forgiveness, righteousness, eternal life, and release from the anxieties of serving the false gods of money, anxieties, and finally death. We need the Lord Jesus and all that He did to redeem us from sin, Satan, fear, worry, anxiety, and death. The writer to the Hebrews said Christ partook of our flesh and blood that “he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb. 2:14–15).

We know what Jesus did to save us. In love for us, He lived, suffered, bore our sins, fears, and worries, bled and died to save us. He rose from the dead to secure our own resurrection from the dead and restore us to eternal life. By these great deeds, Jesus destroyed the power of the devil. As Christians baptized into our Lord’s death and resurrection, we are no longer subject to the devil’s tyranny. The Lord Jesus Christ is our God and master. And He has complete authority over every detail of our lives. With good courage, we know He provides for all our needs of body and soul. With such faith and trust in Jesus, “we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” knowing “all these (earthly, temporal needs) will be added to (us)” (vs. 33). Seek first the Lord who saved you. He loves you, more than you can fully know in this life. Christ is our life, joy, hope, and strength. Seek Him.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.