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**Summer Preaching Series:**  
*Characters of the Bible*  
**Elijah**

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A Sermon By  
The Rev. Richard D. Meadows, Jr.

July 22, 2018  
The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
Grace Episcopal Church  
Silver Spring, Maryland

# Summer Preaching Series

## *Characters of the Bible: Elijah*

The Rev. Richard D. Meadows, Jr.  
Grace Episcopal Church  
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 22, 2018

1 Kings 17

*But after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "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." Elijah said to her, "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." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days.*

His name is representative of his relationship with God. From the Hebrew name אֱלִיָּהוּ ('Eliyyahu) meaning "my God is YAHWEH", derived from the elements אֵל (el) and יָה (yah), both referring to the Hebrew God. **Elijah** was a Hebrew prophet and miracle worker, as told in the two Books of Kings in the Old Testament.

Elijah's dress was symbolic and stood for his chosen vow of poverty, you could say he was not materialistic in nature. His separation and denouncement of the world; he was not controlled by the lifestyle of the world. He was separated to the Lord as God's servant. If he did have a crowd around him it was usually his Protégés who were prophets in training. He was a proclaimer of the Word of Yahweh and had no problem speaking truth to power i.e. Ahab and Jezebel. He knew who he was (God's representative), where he was in a sinful Israel that because of idolatry and worship of strange gods, stood opposed to the purposes of God and why he was there (to give out God's message of light to people in darkness). What a contrast Elijah must have been to the people of his day.

You would think that Elijah would be comfortable in his skin, yet he had fears, doubts and insecurities. At one point he feared for his life and ran away from death threats against him. He was certainly not a man of financial stability but dependent upon others generosity. It looks as though God elected him from birth to prophesy to the kingdom and be a man of humility.

In our Old Testament reading this morning, he has this encounter with the widow of Zarephath that lets him know that he is not alone and that God will supply his every need while on assignment for God. God sends him to a woman of meager means where he reciprocates her kindness with a miracle. She no doubt has fears concerning this drought and what she would do to sustain her and her son during the drought whereby it would not rain for 3 years and 6 months. She'd give him room and board and because of her distress and kindness the prophet provide get with the miracle of not running out of oil during this time span. In the biblical accounts the people Elijah encounters and relationships are just as important to his character as his relationship to the history of the prophets of Israel.

Elijah also reminds us to not be anxious, but through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God. When we become anxious, or afraid, or spirits fill up with doubt or uncertainty, God has a plan to relieve your anxiety.

***So we must question: Was Elijah anxious or fearful about anything although he is a prophet of Israel and an archetype of Christ?***

***Is he is the pattern, an original model or type after which other similar things are patterned; a Prototype?***

In our gospel reading from Matthew 17 - After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Jesus is memorialized in this Transfiguration as seen by Peter, James and John. He is thought of by some of the Israelites of his time to be the resurrected Elijah. It is here too that Elijah is raised to a new level of biblical importance.

He is given importance when Jesus in a conversation asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" "Some say, John the Baptist, some say Elijah!" Why not? He fits the mold; simple, unorthodox, and a bit quirky, if I may use the term.

On another occasion, the disciples came to Jesus asking, if you are Messiah, then where is Elijah? They knew the prophecy said that Elijah must come before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Jesus answered in Matthew 17:12-13: *"But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they liked. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist."* John, because of his mannerisms and Elijah-like style is thought of as a resurrected Elijah. This is transference of imagery today is what we would call Archetype-inherited pattern of thought or symbolic imagery derived from past collective experience and present in the individual unconscious. Jesus more so than John resembles this forceful fellow who fills jars with oil and raises people from the dead.

Elijah is the prophet of his day assigned to fight the prophets of the god Baal and the evil kingship of Ahab. He is the biblical superhero who finds himself overwhelmed by the assignment and must take time to rest and refresh himself in time of drought and despair. He is very human and also is the theophany or the visible manifestation of the Jesus and John who were to come. He is a part of not only historical Israel and the life and times of Jesus, but Elijah appears in the eschatological periscope of the prophets who testify of the final end and defeat of Satan. Revelation 11:4 These are the two (Elijah and Moses) olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm these two, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; (Elijah: Remember he said it would not rain for 3 years and 6 months) and they have power over waters to turn them to blood (Moses in his confrontation with Pharaoh), and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. As they laid in the street the people of the Earth celebrated their deaths until the Spirit of God breathes on them and once again too men who according to biblical accounts are raised once again from the clutches of death.

This story like most about Elijah talks about miracles and relationships. He meets several people along the way who provide him with a place to live and meals. His relationships extend not only to humans but nature as well. He is feed by Ravens, he is spoken to clouds in the shape of a man's hand that let him know it would begin to rain again. He retrieves the borrowed axe head which had fallen into the water, he cleanses the pot of poison mushrooms so no one would die. He wins an important battle by blinding a whole enemy army, defeats thousands of Baal's prophets with fire from heaven, watches as his enemy Jezebel is trampled by horses and finally does not taste death by being carried up into heaven by fire breathing horses and a pimped out Chariot with spinning wheels of fire.

Yes he was this amazing prophet, who was the type and forerunner of the Jesus/John type. He was the original honey and would locust, living off nature, when afraid of the powerful he only need to renew his strength. So we take his life to conclude, when you are fearful, overwhelmed, under attack, exhausted from the work of ministry, look around you because interaction with others is part of God's plan. It could be the Raven this will feed you or some widow.