

## JESUS KNOWS HOW TO CARE FOR US

1 Kings 17:1-16

**TEXT:** *Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there." So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the LORD came to him: "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." "As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread-only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it-and die." Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'" She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Remember those fairy tales that told of magic geese and beans, godmothers who offered to grant three wishes? Do those magic promises ever leave our hearts and desires? Jack and the beanstalk found magic beans and the wealth of a heavenly giant. He and his mother lived happily ever after. There was a goose who laid a golden egg, and Cinderella's fairy godmother. The end was always the same: and they lived happily ever after.

Then there is the story of a king who had a son. At first, the king offered his son a yearly allowance of such wealth that his son only came to visit his father once a year, on the day he was to be given his allowance. So the wise king changed the way he granted his son his allowance. Instead of paying him a large amount once a year, he gave him an allowance sufficient for one day, on a daily basis. The son also changed his visitation habits. He came to see his father every day.

Our Lord Jesus Christ knows even better how to care for us, the members of His body, the Church, while we serve as members of the Church Militant; and, while He prepares to take us to heaven.

The Church Militant is all who believe in Jesus while living on this side of the grave. It is all of God's elect who are fighting the good fight of faith while being endlessly assaulted by God's enemies: Satan, the unbelievers of this world, and even our own sinful natures. As members of the Church Militant, each of us are a small but important part of a far greater picture than we can see with our own eyes. We may feel small and insignificant, but until the Lord takes each of us to heaven, we are part of the mighty army of the Lord. We are Christian soldiers, so to speak.

Elijah, one of history's greatest prophets, even had difficulty in seeing the broad picture of our Lord's Kingdom here on this earth. He was called to serve as the official preacher of the Israel's royal courts. However, King Ahab, happened to be one of Israel's most godless kings. He married Jezebel who was world-renowned for her evil ways. God sent Elijah to Ahab to warn of a drought and a famine that God was going to use to give Israel a spiritual spanking: ***As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.*** Elijah announces that he will be in complete control over this divine judgment: ***except at my word...*** That why God told Elijah to go into hiding. Almighty God would command nature's birds to bring him food -- almost like a fairy tale. But this is true.

When the brook that supplied drinking water dried up because of the drought, the Lord did not produce a

bubbling spring, but sent him to one of the members of the Lord's Church -- a widow living in the town of Zeraphath. God knew this woman, even though this woman herself did not have a clue about how significant a part she was to have at this particular point in the history of the world's salvation.

It's not a pretty picture that history paints us. She is a widow who is nothing in the eyes of man's kingdom. She has a son, and together they have come to the point of depravation that causes them to reason: "Let's go and prepare our last meal, for it will be our last."

The true Church is not the glorious institution we see shining in the beautiful city of Rome. It's not the administration that sits in the WELS building in Milwaukee. It's not a pretty picture at all, since it is only made up of souls who have gathered around the saving Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Each time a baby is baptized, a member of the Church has been revealed. According to 1 Peter 2:9, he is now one of us: ***...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*** But while little our baby believers live with us on this side of the grave, they are part of the big picture called The Church Militant and are the targets of all of Christ's enemies, Satan, Sin and the unbelievers who would snatch their faith from their hearts.

All this seems so insignificant to the world that it would ignore it completely. It would look at our list of shut-ins and say: what a waste of time and money! It would look at our tiny school and say: that is nothing! It would look at each of you and measure your bank accounts and say: what good are you? All of this can distract our thoughts from the big picture of God's salvation through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament so that we might become discouraged.

Even Elijah had trouble seeing the big picture. Just before he went to heaven, even this great prophet fell into a depression and resigned his ministry. Ahab refused to listen to God's Word. God came to him with the big picture: ***I reserve seven thousand in Israel-all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.*** 1 Kings 19 God know who are his Elect, so he commanded Elijah: ***Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.*** The Lord knew this widow whom he would use to take care of Elijah. She would provide the humble service of God in caring for one of the Church's greatest prophets!

Jesus knows how to care for each and every one of us while we serve Him in whatever capacity He has placed us to serve in this Church Militant. He knows how to care for us as He prepares to take us to heaven.

I think that all of us here today would admit that the world is in need of a spiritual spanking as was ancient Israel. Our nation needs one. It's full of all kinds of sin and wickedness unsurpassed in all of the world's history. We are a nation that is the richest, but we still whine and complain and worry as if we have no God.

Even while we belong to a fine congregation, we might find times when we feel like Elijah -- like we are the only ones, and we are getting smaller and smaller. If we only had a golden egg, or, a jar of oil and bag of flour that never would run out. If we had it, we would give it and do great things for God.

And so we fall victim to our own sinful flesh that never lets us rest, but causes us to covet, lust, worry and fret day and night. Unless God would seek us out and find us, to comfort and assure us, we, too, would do what so many around us are doing: giving up and giving in to their soul's damnation.

The widow of Zeraphath was a Christian. She trusted the word of God that Elijah had brought to her. Trusting God and His Word, she used all that she had for their last meal to make the meal instead for the Prophet of God. She also would have done what Jesus commands all His believers to do: ***...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*** Matt 6

Did the Lord set this woman up for a life of ease? No. Elijah clearly told her: ***The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.*** There would come a day when things would get back to nature and the jar would finally have to be filled by oil she would have to purchase. In the same way, Jesus knows how to care for all who trust in Him. And His wise method is that every individual who belongs to Him will receive such special treatment that He teaches us to pray: ***Give***

*us this day our DAILY bread...* Put My Word first in your life as food for your soul, and I'll keep you humbly trusting in it until the day when I transport you from this Church Militant to the Church Triumphant in heaven.

Do you believe this? Then put His Word first! That is how the good fight of faith is waged! Let us fight the good fight by giving of our earthly energy, time and money so that there always will be pastors who preach like Elijah the truth of forgiveness of sins in Jesus and life eternal in heaven. Don't JUST bring little your babies to Jesus in Holy Baptism, but continue to bring them to worship and to learn to listen to Jesus, like Mom and Dad, until they grow up to take your places as mighty warriors in the Lord's Church Militant.

Elijah was a great prophet. The widow of Zarapeth isn't even named. Yet the Lord knows where we are and how to care for each and every one of us while he uses us to serve in his Church Militant until our work is done are we are called home. Amen