

**THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST June 6, 9, 10, 2007**  
**St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI**

**LISTEN TO THE LORD 1 Kings 17:8-16**

How well do you listen? Do you always hear everything someone says? Or do you hear what you want to hear? Many of us have selective hearing. We hear what we want to hear and we filter out those things which we don't like or that make us upset and hit too close to home. Today we are beginning our summer sermon series as we look at events in the lives of two of God's Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha.

Elijah was from Gilead, a region east of the Jordan River. Today that would be in the nation of Jordan. He was called by God to call the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to repentance to change from their worship of false gods. The period of time that we are talking about was from 874 to 853 BC. During the time of Elijah, Ahab was king of Israel and his queen was Jezebel who was from Sidon. Today that would be in Lebanon. This was not a good time in the history of Israel. Ahab's father, Omri, had arranged the marriage of his son, Ahab, to Jezebel, the daughter of the King of Sidon, Ethbaal. Jezebel did not know the Lord the God of Israel. She brought with her the worship of Baal. Baal was thought to be the god of fertility. He caused the rain to fall and the crops to grow. It was he who saw to it that the people's cattle and sheep reproduced. The worship of Baal involved having sexual relations with male and female temple prostitutes. The thought was that if you had sex with the prostitute in the temple, that would cause the god and goddess in the sky to have sex which would lead to rain which would cause your crops to grow and produce an abundant harvest and it would also cause your flocks and herds to reproduce so that you would have more sheep and cattle. This worship also involved child sacrifices. People would burn and kill their children and offer them to this god.

It was into such a culture that God placed Elijah to call his people back to the Lord and to the worship of him. As we consider an event in Elijah's life we would like to focus our attention on this thought **LISTEN TO THE LORD**. As we watch Elijah we note the need to **I) Follow God's Commands**. As we see all that happens we are assured **II) The LORD Keeps His Promises**.

**FOLLOW GOD'S COMMANDS**

God had told Elijah to go to King Ahab and tell him that there would not be any rain or dew in Israel for the next few years except at his word. Now this word from the Lord attacked the very heart of the worship of Baal. Remember the people were led to believe that it was Baal who provided rain for their crops and their herds and flocks. Elijah says the Lord; the God of Israel has said there will not be any rain except at my word. The Lord then instructed Elijah to leave this place and go back across the Jordan River to the east to the Kerith Ravine. The Lord promised Elijah that he would send ravens to feed him and there was water in the brook that ran through the ravine. Elijah did as the Lord commanded him.

The writer of 1 Kings tells us that after a time the brook dried up because there had been no rain. What was Elijah to do now? The Lord told him to pack up and move to Zarephath. This was about 130 miles north in the land of Tyre and Sidon. This is where Jezebel came from. This was the land where the worship of Baal came from. Elijah was to leave the land of Israel and move to a foreign and unbelieving country. How would he be taken care of there? After God told Elijah to leave the Lord also told him, "I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." (v. 9b) Elijah did as the Lord commanded him. We are told that when Elijah came to the entrance of Zarephath, he met a widow who was busy gathering some wood for a fire. Elijah asked her for a small drink of water. He also asked her to bring him a small piece of bread. The woman told Elijah that she didn't have any bread. All she had was a small handful of meal and a little oil. She told the prophet that she was going home to build a fire and cook this little amount of food that she and her son could eat it and then wait to die because she had nothing left. But Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you 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.” (v. 13) Elijah then said to her, “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 earth.’” (v. 14) So the woman did as the prophet had told her.

Would you do what these two people did? Would you pack up and move hundreds of miles away to a hostile and foreign land? Would you take all that you had and first give to someone else before you had taken care of yourself and your family? That’s exactly what the prophet Elijah did and that’s what the widow from the city of Zarephath did. Why? Because God told them to do so. They followed God’s commands.

When the Kerith brook dried up, Elijah needed water. But to go to the land where this idol worship which caused all these problems in Israel in the first place. Does that make sense? Or when the widow only had this little bit of food and then to give first to Elijah before she took care of her son and herself? Does that make sense? Both of these people trusted the Lord and his Word to them.

Do we? What Baals are we worshiping? Isn’t the Baal of 2007 in the United States of America materialism? Aren’t we more concerned about things than anything else? What makes us feel secure? A large and growing stock portfolio? What do we value most? A large and beautiful home? A new car? What are we living for? To accumulate more and more things or to have more fun and entertainment. We see how that worship of money has affected our congregation and our church body. Offerings decline. Why? Because my needs are more important than spreading the good news of Jesus the Savior of all to people who don’t know him Right now our school is in need of upgrades and remodeling, but I don’t have any children there why should I pay for other people’s children? Selfishness. Our church body faces the closing of one of our schools of the prophets, Michigan Lutheran Seminary. Why? Because the people of our church body have decided that they don’t want to support these endeavors any more. So what does the Lord do? He takes them away from us. He gives them to others who are more appreciative and who value these blessings. . Have you ever noticed that whenever money is spoken about at church, we often hear the comment, “All they ever preach about at St. Mark’s is money.”? People who are making those comments are indicating that one of their gods is money.

People of God, we have forgotten something. The LORD keeps his promises. We don’t have to be afraid. The Savior will take care of us. Look at what the Lord did for Elijah and the widow of Zarephath.

### **THE LORD KEEPS HIS PROMISES**

Look at how the LORD took care of Elijah. He had ravens feed him at the Kerith Ravine and the brook there provided him with water. When those resources dried up, the LORD sent him to another land and took care of him there and not just Elijah but also the widow and her son at Zarephath. As the Word of God says, “So there was food everyday 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.” (Vv. 15-16)

We often forget that the Lord does keep all of his promises. The first and most important promise that our God keeps to us is the promise of forgiveness of all our sins. I once told a person who was struggling with guilt over a particular sin that he had committed, “God forgives you.” The person responded, “That’s what you keep on telling me.” I said, “No that’s what God says.” He’s promised each and every one of us here, “I forgive your wickedness and I remember your sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34c) Isn’t it great that we don’t have to go through life carrying the burden and weight of our guilt? Jesus Christ has removed that from us as far as the east is from the west.

Now as the Lord has been faithful in keeping that promise to forgive our sins and release us from fear, he is also faithful in keeping his promises to provide for us and protect us. As Jesus said in our Gospel reading for today, “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:31-32)

As Elijah said to the widow so we need to hear those words over and over again, “Don’t be afraid.” (v. 13a) The Lord our God will take care of us. He will supply all our needs. Not all our wants. Here is where we all have to battle against the god of materialism which has convinced us that we can’t live without all these gadgets and we can’t live without this car and that home and this amount in our savings account. The majority of the people of this world are not sure where their next meal is coming from. In this country we have to try and decide what we are going to eat not whether we will eat or not. God is faithful. We don’t have to be afraid as we give freely and generously for the spread of his Word as we support Christian education and world wide Christian mission work and as we help those who are in need and experience misfortunes in their lives

Amen. +.