

"This, Therefore That" 1 Kings 17:17-24 Trinity 16 2022

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever had one of those experiences? The ones where you do your best and you give your all and you try to be faithful, and what happens? You get problems. You have what is called "bad luck." Everyone has those times. It seems to us like life should pay back the investment. If I try, and if I am good, I expect to succeed and find rewards and just compensation. Instead, I find pain and frustration and trouble.

That is the situation of this good woman of Zarephath. We heard last week how she fed the prophet with the very last of her food. She had just enough to make one more meal for herself and her son, and then, because the famine was so severe, she was going to sit down and wait for death. But Elijah told her to feed him something first, and then she could go and fix that last meal. So, she did. And God caused the little bit of flour and the little bit of oil to last for many weeks - long enough for the drought to end, and a new crop to grow and new flour and oil to be produced.

So, she thought that she had a reason to expect special and good treatment from God on account of her faithfulness. So, imagine her surprise when her son falls ill and dies. For some reason - probably the popular belief that your behaviour determines how God works with you

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- she makes a connection between her troubles and her sins of the past, whatever they may be and she figures it is a case of this, therefore that. And that is our theme. This text shows us how there is a connection between things - logically and theologically. Our theme is This, therefore that.

The woman made the connection between her misfortune and her sins. I cannot say that she is right or wrong, because the text doesn't say it. But what the woman did that was correct - and natural - was make the connection between human troubles and sin, and between her close contact with God through the prophet, and guilt. Because God is holy, when we come into close contact with God, either through His Word, or His messengers, the Law of God is always brought to the forefront. We don't have to look for it. We don't need to want it. God is holy, and wherever His holiness is seen or felt, our sin stands in stark contrast. The Law of God is preached, even when no one says a word.

Life will be painful and difficult at times, even for Christians. That pain and those difficulties will preach the Law to us. They will scourge us and make us question the love of God and His good will toward us. We won't necessarily think of it that way - we may just expect pain. Pretty soon, we will begin to think of sickness and trouble as the lot we

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have been given by God. That is when the troubles begin, troubles like those that haunted this widow of Zarephath. Some might even begin to despair of any hope from Him - and therefore become unbelievers - because they continue to battle troubles - even while they think of themselves as believers.

That is the danger. We might allow our troubles to preach false theology to us. We might listen to our aches and our sorrows and think that we hear the heart of God toward us in those troubles. I have seen it happen more than once. If it does, we then have a head of faith - and a heart of fear and worry and despair. When that happens, we are no longer believers, at least in the sense of saving faith. We have the faith of the head, which means we still think we believe - but we don't trust God. In this situation, we despair of His love, His good will toward us, or His ability to make things better for us. We call this being "nominally Christian" - Christian in name, but not in reality.

That is not what this text is about, however. The woman's despair and fear and guilt were in the lesson to highlight the other part. The other part tells us about the power, and the goodwill, of God. God can do anything, and He is merciful. This is also the point of our Epistle lesson this morning, and Paul concludes the verses of our Epistle with these words, Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all

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that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Elijah takes the dead child and prays. God answers the prayers of Elijah, and brings the boy back to life! What an amazing thing! God can do anything. He has the power to provide whatever it is we need. We can trust in Him. And the woman takes the healing of her son, this great blessing from God, and she understands that this blessing is evidence that Elijah is God's prophet and that what Elijah says when he preaches God's Word, is truth. That is the "This, therefore that" of our theme.

When God shows His power and His good will toward us, then we should be brought to trust in His Word and His promises and His will for us. And what is the will of God toward us? To answer that, we look at the cross of Jesus Christ. God demonstrated His love for us and His will to save us by giving us His Son. Jesus was born one of us, fully human. What a humbling step that was! He was poor by any standards and lived in abject poverty by our standards today. He faced all of the temptations to sin that are common to man. He endured hostility toward Himself for nothing more than being holy and righteous. Finally, He allowed Himself to be falsely convicted and willingly bore

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our sins and guilt to the cross. He suffered almost unimaginable agony - and the wrath of God against our sins in His soul. He who is God was forsaken by God! He died, even though He had earned the right to life without end. He died in your place, and in yours, and mine! He paid the price demanded by the justice of God for our sins.

Then he rose again from the grave. Just like the son of the Widow in our lesson - except He did not need a prophet throwing His body over Him and interceding with God for His life. He laid down His life for us, and He took it up again of His own power - raised by the Spirit of God to proclaim that sin was done with, the guilt was no more, and that death had been conquered by life. His resurrection tells us that God loves us and wants us to live with Him beyond death and every symptom and consequence of sin. He that believes and is Baptized, shall be saved.

This, therefore that. Because Jesus has died -- and has risen from His grave, your sins are forgiven! There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. It is by grace, and it is received by faith. It is possessed by taking God at His Word and trusting Him and trusting His promises. You want to be like the widow of Zarephath. You want to see the great things that God has done - particularly the great things that He has done for you - and find in them

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the evidence that God's Word is truth. His love for you is as real as His Word says that it is. He loves you, and He means to rescue and save you! You can see what God has done on the cross - and in the empty tomb of Easter. This, therefore that. You can trust God - and His Word is true. Amen.