**220710 Sermon**  1 Kings 17:8-16

Galatians 1:11-24

This sermon has no title, The Spirit shot down my first couple of attempts…

So being up here is tricky. A good sermon needs to be:

1. Theologically correct
2. Relevant to our current circumstances
3. Find the common thread that links the readings
4. …And it needs to be done in less than 20 minutes.

I believe that God speaks directly to us through the Bible. Through scripture God tells us what we need to know and what we need to hear at that particular moment in our lives. The Bible is not a static document, and because of this what God tells me today may not be what God tells you tomorrow, even though we may read the same verse.

Scripture is great because we see how consistent human nature is through the ages. These tales are thousands of years old, but the lessons they teach are every bit as relevant today as they were then, and today they reach out across history to teach us again.

Preaching from the OT is fun. The stories are complex and what they don’t say is as important as what they DO say.

Preaching from the lectionary is also really fun; finding that common theme is like solving a puzzle.

So…what to talk about? (Not Miracles…they’re great to have, but counting on them is a bad strategy)

Teachers, you’ve heard about teaching the test

There will be a test, and I’m Preaching the test…

Two themes of this sermon:

1. The Lord chooses some really unusual folks as its agents
2. God’s agents stand in intimate solidarity with people at risk

**Part 1:**

(Set the stage)

What’s happening in Kings?

* ~870 BC, northern Kingdom (Israel)
* Ahab and Jezabel,
* Zarapheth & Sidon,
* Baal worship at the Imperial level in blatent disobedience to God’s mandate
* Elijah’s prophecy to Ahab, announcing Drought & famine,
* the widow,
* the ask, “Feed me…”
* the impossible task: drive out Baal worship and restore worship of God

What’s happening in Galatians?

* Paul, ace persecutor of the early Christian community
* His self-declaration of apostolic authority very different from the original apostles who actually worked directly with Jesus
* Paul’s mission to the gentiles, totally unthinkable
* no partnership w/ Jerusalem, undermining the status quo
* The impossible task: take the Gospel to the gentiles

Let’s take a closer look at look through the lens of other characters:

1. The widow and the citizens of Zarephath - This wild man from the desert: homeless, hungry, dirty, dangerous, likely insane. At best a nuisance, at worst he places the whole community at risk
2. Church leadership Jerusalem and civic *status quo:* This wild man knocking around in Galatia, undermining everything we’ve risked our lives for; preaching a (possible) heretical message. **how DARE he**?!

The mission: Save the world!

* Elijah - From the Ahab, Jezabel, and the worshipers of Baal who would subvert and negate God’s mandate and covenant with Israel
* Paul - From elitist Judeo-Christians (proto-christians?) who would limit the Gospel of Christ’s saving grace to only God’s chosen

These guys, Elijah and Paul have absolutely nothing going for them:

1. No power
2. No earthly authority (financial, political, military)
3. No money
4. No friends
5. Bad history
6. Enemies
7. Fugitives

Through the lens of history, we know these guys as pillars of the Church, but in Elijah and Paul’s time, these guys were…

***Un-employable!!!***

if you’re paying attention, you’ll recognize we just covered the first point: God selects the most unlikely characters to perform the most impossible missions.

Why does God choose the most unlikely servants?

Perhaps because they are the most relatable…that’s a different sermon

**Point #2**

Let’s talk about RISK

Everyone in today’s readings is at risk

1. Elijah, for speaking truth to power and announcing the Drought
2. Widow – Like Elijah she has nothing left to lose except her life, and that is now forfeit because of her association with Elijah
3. Whole Zarephath, by association. Paul and the widow together have placed the entire community at risk (there might be a whole sermon here…)
4. All of Israel (no hope of salvation, given the state-sponsored Baal worship under the leadership of King Ahab who is under the influence of the wicked Sidonian, Queen Jezebel)
5. Paul for his heresy and rebellion against
   1. The Church (Jerusalem)
   2. Unreceptive and / or uncaring audience
   3. Rome (later)
6. Church leadership in Jerusalem because of Paul’s politics
7. Established Judaism **and** Christianity
8. All the gentiles (no plan of salvation)

Yet In spite of the (literally) existential risk, both Paul and Elijah stand firmly with their people

(The people of Israel, in Elijah’s case and the whole of the Gentile world (the vast majority of the civilized world)), in Paul’s case

the most doomed, hopeless, and at-risk cohort you could find.

These two readings today are just a snippet in two epic tales of Political brinksmanship

1. Elijah v. Ahab & Jezebel
2. Paul v. Jerusalem establishment

So this is the second point: God’s agents stand in intimate solidarity with those at-risk. Not aprt, but embedded deep in the community

They, God’s agents (as unlikely as they are) have:

An unwavering belief their mission

A fearless defiance of authority

A disregard for personal risk

A disdain for personal gain

A fierce love for the unloved

**Extra credit: Part 3**

How long does this take?

By modern accounts Elijah’s ministry lasted approximately 27 years beginning with his prophecy to Ahab and concluding with his anointing of his successor Elisha

Paul’s ministry lasted approximately 30 years, and in that time, as recounted in 2 Corinthians, Chapter 11:

Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches..."

- 2 Corinthians 11:24-28.

Take-aways:

1. Are you one of God’s unlikely agents?
   1. Paul & Elijah knew it through direct revelation.
   2. Some few folks recognize the call
   3. Some more folks feel compelled to act
   4. But what about the widow?!
   5. How would **we** know.. how would **you** know?
   6. Doesn’t matter – recognize that God may be speaking through you
2. God’s agents stand in Intimate solidarity with those at risk
   1. Elijah with the Widow and All of Israel
   2. Paul and the unchosen ones (all of the civilized world minus Jerusalem)
3. Extra credit: follow the simple formula – show up and do the work, and settle in for a long effort
   1. It’s hard work
   2. It may take years

The work of

Feeding

Teaching

Challenging the norms

Laboring

Defending

And above all Loving

Through God, by God, for all

Amen