



“Elijah Revives a Child”

Preaching Text: 1 Kings 17:8-24

9 June 2013—3rd Sunday after Pentecost

FUMC, Arlington, Texas

About the time of Israel's exile Deuteronomistic historians wrote/edited books from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings. Their overarching purposes were (a) to help the community understand why the exile took place, by offering a theological explanation, (b) to reinforce the community's confidence in God's power to deliver them, and (c) to prompt the community to take remedial actions that would help return them to their land and, once they had returned, to prevent a recurrence of the exile (Ron Allen, in *Feasting on the Word*, electronic edition). Hear the lesson for the day from 1 Kings 17:8-24:

8 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.” 10 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.” 11 As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” 12 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.”

13 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. 14 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.” 15 She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. 16 The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

17 After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. 18 She then said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!” 19 But he said to her, “Give me your son.” He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. 20 He cried out to the LORD, “O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?” 21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the LORD, “O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again.”

22 The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23 Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, “See, your son is alive.” 24 So the



woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth” (1 Kings 17:8-24).

This story generally has to do with trust—which when you come right down to it, is the essence of faith. Certainly belief has a part and in some theologies nothing matters except belief. Yet we might say that faith is really belief added to trust. We trust and therefore we can live. When we look at heroes/heroines of faith, like for example, Esther, Gideon, Moses, Abraham, and Joshua we note their bold faith more than a developed theology based on what they believed.

In practically any relationship there is what we might call the “psychology of trust.” Does another person (or group of people) give me a sense of them that elicits trust? Can I rely on the other person or persons, in other words? We see in Elijah’s story that trust is necessary for human beings to function.

Trust, however, is problematic for humans because we have certain inborn survival traits. Often our lack of trust is a needed survival skill. It reveals the reptile brain or instincts we have, according to some psychologists, like Loretta Graziano Breuning, who wrote about this subject in *Psychology Today*.

According to Breuning, your reptile brain evolved to avoid pain. It is always scanning for cues associated with past pain. And in a humorous insight she writes that “Lizards make social decisions with a few simple rules. If it’s bigger than you, run. If it’s smaller than you, try to eat it. If it’s about the same size, try to mate it.” A lizard starts running the moment it cracks out of its shell, and if it doesn’t run fast enough, its parent may eat it (wisely recycling weaklings into new siblings instead of leaving them for predators). Reptiles do not trust other reptiles . . . and they do not seek survival by bonding with other reptiles ([psychologytoday.com/collections/201106/whom-can-you-trust/trust-feels-good-betrayal-feels-bad-how-we-decide](https://www.psychologytoday.com/collections/201106/whom-can-you-trust/trust-feels-good-betrayal-feels-bad-how-we-decide)).

Thus when asked to trust another, whether a person or God, we take a leap of faith. In church we regularly make pledges of trust to other people. It happens, for



example, each time we baptize. In fact, the baptismal covenant is an excellent example of how we pledge our faith to those who are entering our covenant community.

Churches celebrate the baptismal covenant in worship because this is where we offer our pledge of faith most earnestly. As you remember we ask:

Will you nurture these children (twins/persons) in Christ's holy Church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God's grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?

This affirmation is an affirmation of trust. We can trust each other because we can trust God and we do so together as God's people. Jim Moore offers a constructive illustration of trust in his book *When All Else Fails, Read the Instructions*. He writes:

I once read an article about the training of Arabian stallions. Day after day, hour after hour, the stallions are taught to obey the master, to trust him completely, and to always respond promptly to his call. The master has a whistle, and when he sounds the whistle, the stallions are trained to stop, no matter what the circumstances, and come immediately to the master. Then as a final test, the stallions are placed in a corral in the desert, midway up a hillside. At the bottom of the hill is a beautiful oasis with crystal blue waters. The stallions stay in the corral for several hours under the blazing desert sun, until they are frantic for water.

Then the master stands at the top of the hill, and the stallions are released from the corral. Of course, they all head straight for the water. But just before they reach the water, the master blows the whistle. The horses that ignore the master's call and go on toward the water are considered not ready and must have further training. But the stallions who turn, despite their terrible thirst, and come immediately to the master are considered well-trained and they graduate. They trust the master completely. They put his will before their own.

My guess is that if we ever get to the point where we can really trust God, then our trust of one another will follow naturally. Whether we are in a capital funds campaign, or deciding what mission projects are worthy of our time and treasure, or what kind of youth activities to offer, if we trust God, then we can trust one another. Trust is the heart of the Christian faith and the heart of any church worthy of the name.

To close, we could say that trust in a church is much like the trust displayed in a marriage relationship. If trust is present, then we can usually work out all the problems. As Nanette Newman, a British actress once quipped, "A good marriage is



at least 80 percent good luck in finding the right person at the right time. The rest is trust." And trust allows us to function within society even with people we will never meet.

During the Great Depression, *The Reader's Digest* carried a story called "The Legend of Desert Pete." It took place in the Arizona Desert, where a man called Desert Pete dug a series of wells at the intersections of roads and trails where travelers would be thirstiest. What the people found was an old hand operated water pump and it had a little sign that read:

"This pump has to be primed. Look under the white rock and you will find a cup of water. Don't drink it! Prime the pump and pump like crazy and you will have all the water you want." Trust primes the pump, for if only one person drinks the water, then the whole concept collapses.

God has given us everything necessary with which to prime the pump of God's goodness and note how trust completes a circle of life—God spares Elijah by sending him to the widow of Zarephath who also saved Elijah so that he could in turn save her son.

It is all about trust—and you will have to trust me about this. Amen.

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