

Third Sunday after Pentecost

AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD (1 Kings 17:8-24)

By James Forbes

God's call of Elijah was an invitation to a beautiful divine/human partnership of faithfulness and faithful service. It was based on a three-point contract: HO-GO-LO.

“HO” indicates that God had to get his attention. It was important for Elijah to know who was calling him, to whom he was accountable, under whose guidance he was to serve and upon whom he could depend for direction, protection and provisions.

“GO” speaks of the assignment God intended him to fulfill. Elijah was to announce before Ahab, the king, God's judgment against the idolatry that he had encouraged and the apostasy into which the people had fallen. According to Deuteronomy 11:16-17, such behavior would lead to drought and barrenness. Thus Elijah was instructed to speak these words: “As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” Such a hazardous vocation would surely put his life in danger and he too would suffer the consequences of the prophecy of “no dew or rain”. Elijah was told to go and hide himself by the Wadi Cherith and to drink from that brook.

“LO” is the divine promise of the provision of whatever is needed to see the mission through (“Lo, I am with you, always”). Compare this formula with the words of the great commission found in Matthew 28:16-20.

We who are called to service in our time can identify with Elijah whose name means, “Jehovah is my God”. If we have answered the call to be agents of the God of truth and justice, righteousness, peace and compassion, we may be assured that we will need the empowering presence and sustaining grace of the One who recruited us for the mission.

1 Kings 17:8-24 presents the case for calling our work An Amazing Partnership With God.

I. We are partners with God in the world as it is.

- a. People of faith often expect to be at work in the rarified atmosphere of holy territory. In fact, we work in the midst of principalities and powers. We encounter a variety of adversarial forces organized in resistance to the will of God. This means that we do not need to close our eyes to aspects of life which dishonor the commandments of the Lord. Nor should we despair when it is very obvious that we live in the midst of people of unclean lips. Most importantly, we must be aware that as members of the society we suffer the consequences of fallen conditions. When the harvest failed due to the drought, Elijah experienced hunger and thirst as well. Prophetic people are not exempt from the

problems of the world or the hardship and disappointments due to evils around us. We are in, if not of, the world. Hopefully, we can be light in the midst of darkness. God can use us to be a remediating presence in the midst of deteriorating circumstances.

Questions

- 1) What signs do you see today that we may be serving idol gods?
- 2) Who or what poses as an idol god in our nation?
- 3) In what ways are we experiencing famine or drought, naturally or spiritually?
- 4) How do we get beyond scapegoating, blaming and shaming to hear the voice of God?

II. God directs our words and actions.

a. God sends Elijah to recall the people to faithfulness and to renew the covenant with the true God. He is to function according to the guidance of the God who called and commissioned him for his work. God tells him what to say to King Ahab and later to the widow of Zarephath. What he says is not merely a matter of his opinion or a reflection of his general attitude. Yet his voice, words and ideas become the vehicle which conveys the heart and yearning of the Lord. This is a very special partnership. Perhaps at times it is not as clear as one would wish – the divine impulse or the human expression. But so close is the collaboration that spiritual discernment is required to really know the difference. A similar closeness and identification occurs in Elijah's actions. He is led to the brook Cherith and then to Zarephath, to ask for bread and water and eventually to minister new life to the expired son of the widow. How amazing to see such teamwork. Without God, Elijah would have suffered disgrace; without Elijah, God would have required a different plan. This observation offers us a very exquisite but demanding sense of how we are called to be God's servants today.

Questions

- 1) Does God still speak to or through us today?
- 2) When the church makes statements, to what extent do we hear the voice of God?
- 3) What are the best tests to discern whether ideas are divinely inspired or not?
- 4) How does God's word challenge the words and actions based upon race, class, religion, sexual orientation and political party?

III. God provides for our needs and validates our authenticity as servants of God.

a. Elijah's prophecy was confirmed and the famine spread across the land. Special provision had to be made to sustain Elijah to enable him to fulfill his mission. What God

did for Elijah should be an encouragement to all who are in partnership with God. First, the ravens (or the Arabians) were commanded to feed Elijah, then the widow of Zarephath was commanded to feed him. The idea that God was at work to open up channels of blessings for Elijah was most heartening. Could this be a basic feature of the contract; that God will be actively engaged in insuring that resources will be commanded for the sustenance of the members of the service team? At first glance it seemed that Elijah was insensitive, exploitative and purely self-serving in requesting the last morsel of food from the widow, but upon closer observation his request came with a promise from God that her trust would be rewarded with a miracle of unbelievable sustenance. As often occurs following high moments of triumph, the widow discovers the breathless body of her son and wonders if it is because the man of God has exposed her sin and had brought on the calamity. But once again God honors Elijah plea for the son's restoration, who then presents him alive to his mother. The episode ends with the widow's acknowledgement that she had no doubt but that Elijah was a man of God. It is this sequence that encourages us to speak of faithful service to the Lord as an amazing partnership with God.

Questions

- 1) What is Elijah required to do in order to access what God has commanded on his behalf?
- 2) What do we need other than temporal necessities to enable us to keep pressing on in service?
- 3) Was Elijah justified in making the request of the widow?
- 4) To what extent may we expect God to act on our behalf as we seek to be faithful in the work to which we have been called.

Summary

When we read the remarkable experiences of biblical characters we may err on the side of unrealistic expectations or grave doubts about what is likely to happen to us. What is the safe or reasonable inspiration to draw from the dramas of biblical times? First, we must continue to discern from all scriptures what are the ways of God that have been revealed through the ages upon which we can place our hope and trust. We must tell our own account of what has been made known to us in our walk with God. We must draw fresh strength from other witnesses whose experiences convinced them that our God is still the same today.

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