

**FAITH RESPONDS BY TRUSTING IN GOD**

Hear again the Word of God for this fifteenth Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

*Then she went and did according to the word of Elijah. And she and her household ate (for) days.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Today's readings center our thoughts on God's gracious provision for all the needs of body and life for Christians in this fallen creation. God gives His gifts, and Christians respond by faith. Faith responds by trusting in God.

How fitting these texts are for a day when this congregation celebrates the response of one young Christian to the gifts which he has received from the Lord. His responses to the questions posed by the examination are his confession of the Faith. His confession is joined to ours, and is tied directly to Christ's Church's Baptismal Liturgy.

Such a public confession as Max gives is one that should be taken seriously. Like all vows people make in our culture, the promises given by those who are confirmed in the true confession of the Faith, which is produced by Holy Baptism and learned throughout one's years, will come under persecution. Every person who makes the good confession of the Faith, in public rites such as Confirmation, will be tempted, at one time or another, to set aside those vows. Only by God's grace will Max hold fast to the treasures he has learned to confess here. These things he has learned under the direct

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<sup>1</sup> *I Kings 17:15.*

supervision of God's gifts to him - his parents - and, by way of the Fourth Commandment - the men who helped catechize him, and the pastor who examined him.

"What," you may ask, "has the narrative about Elijah and the widow to do with the tradition of Confirmation in the Church?"

The answer is, "much!" The Old Testament reading for this week was chosen years ago. It wasn't picked for this "Confirmation Sunday" from some human whim. There was not so much as any human design, or fiat, here to set Max's promises against these readings. (You may know this is the Sunday that falls between the anniversaries of his birth in Adam and his new birth in Christ). In fact, our tradition here is to use the Rite of Confirmation whenever the persons to be confirmed are deemed prepared, examined, and declared ready by parents, catechists, and pastor (we try for twice a year, but in Christian freedom are not bound to that). All that having been declared, the Old Testament narrative for the day does fit for a "Confirmation Sunday."

Elijah, the inspired prophet of YHWH who received direct revelations from God, had already celebrated the Old Testament forerunner of our Rite of Confirmation long before this day. At this point of his life, he was being tempted to fall from his public vows and the pure confession of the Faith he had been taught and believed. Soon, in terms of the Bible narrative, Elijah would face such persecution on account of his pure public confession of the Faith that he would say, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts...I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *I Kings 19:10, NKJV.*

The Faith he confessed was true. It was living, without error, and it was the power of God to stand against all the assaults of the devil, the world and Elijah's sinful flesh. It was the same Faith you who remain in Christ confess with greater fullness today. That is, the Faith of which this text shows the believer is to rely upon, to call upon in every time of need, is the Faith of Christ.

He, Jesus, held fast to the Right Confession of the Faith all the way into death. Such Faith carried Him from the grave, into Hell, and into life. His Faith lifted Him from this fully mortal realm, and seated Him at the Right Hand of the Father. His Faith rules in this Creation, willing to save humans from sin, death and the devil and give them blessed eternal life. Christ's Faith will return Him someday visibly on the clouds for all humans who have ever lived to see. His Faith will cast the devil, the fallen angels, unrepentant sinners, sin and death itself into the Lake of Fire. His Faith will usher in and sustain the new, everlasting, sinless Heavens and Earth. His Faith will place you who share in it there to reign with Him forever. Faith responds by trusting in God.

That was the Faith that Elijah confessed, though he did not know the person of Jesus. Yet Christ was present in this day's reading. This is clear from its very beginning, as the inspired writer of the words of I Kings records:

*Then (the) Word of YHWH came to him, saying,<sup>3</sup>*

This Word is the Word that was with God, and was God from eternity.

Christ is there, declaring His Word to the prophet, working immediately in Elijah's life,

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<sup>3</sup> I Kings 17:8.

giving him the words that God's sinning people need to hear. It is this pre-incarnate Word that will give Elijah the power of God to stand and not fall at the brink of despairing of his "confirmation" vows. That is because Faith responds by trusting in God.

Elijah, who had entered the Faith through circumcision and the Word was faced with an application of that Faith. In particular, he was commanded to declare the convicting, condemning and killing Law that people, in particular the king of Israel, might sorrow over their sins and desire to walk in newness of life. There was a very life-threatening proposition which came from rebuking that nation's leader. It is not like our culture that might see at most a public censure of one who dares to confront the leaders of the land. Those ancient kings held the power of life and death in their hands. For a preacher to call them unrepentant sinners, liars and the like could cost him everything. Those kings didn't "slap wrists," they hacked off heads!

It was to a called prophet of YHWH that the Word came, just after He had commanded him declare a drought as punishment for their sins. They had worshipped a multitude of gods in addition to retaining the form of worship of the One True God. In this way, their pluralism, that is, the notion that one may allow the worship of multiple gods was like that in countries like ours that hold to the concept of free exercise of religion. In another way, their land was like ours is becoming. They participated in sins of comingling the religions in the land; of holding that other paths lead to paradise; of placing the One True God on par with a host of other gods, and the like.

Because of the harshness of the Law that was coming upon King Ahab and Israel, God desired to preserve his prophet. His will was to have that preacher continue to declare the Word of the Lord for some time to come. To that end, God provided an “out” for the rightly confessing Elijah. The Word said to him,

*“Arise! Go to Zarephath, to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold! I have commanded there (a) woman, (a) widow, to sustain you.”<sup>4</sup>*

To get Elijah out of harm’s way, God sends him away from the land of Israel... and into the lands of the pagans! Elijah would be preserved from religious zealots – the “religiously correct” people of his day – by leaving them in order to dwell for the time of the drought in a land where the worship of the One True God was relatively unknown. In sending Elijah Mediterranean coast God was going to perform His mission. But, Elijah was not to be a missionary to the pagans. Rather, he was to be the recipient of God’s mission through the hands of one of the saints.

Just so it will be for all the confirmed in the Church’s confession of the Faith. When trials, persecutions, bodily harm and perhaps mortal death come upon them for their good confession of the Faith, God will preserve them (perhaps by delivering them through death into Paradise). He will make them recipients of His mission to sustain believers. And, He will, in many instances, use other believers to provide for them. As in the case of Elijah, such strengthening of the faithful in the Faith often comes through others confirmed in the Faith. Reflect on the text. We heard, repeatedly in different forms, that the Word told Elijah, *Behold! I have commanded there (a) widow to sustain you.*

That indicates that the widow would be a believer! The persecuted Elijah was to receive help from a Gentile in the land of Gentiles. She would be God's means to sustain his body and life until such time as God's punishment upon the people of Israel for their sins, in order to call them to repentance, would end.

Elijah grasped the Lord's intent. He traveled the 75 or so miles from the east side of the Jordan rift down to the coastline, to the area northwest of the ancient kingdom of Israel. This was the land of the Israelites' ancient enemies, the Canaanites. Elijah would be delivered from suffering under God's wrath by the means of a widow of the faith, whom God had ordered to care for him in the land of his people's enemies. All this was to occur as Elijah fled from the land where he should have been welcomed for his declaring the Word of God! That would have been a good time for Elijah to remember the words imprinted on his heart and mind by his father during his time of catechesis. But, Elijah was human and he seemed to need more than the pure Word he had learned. Even so, God knows that Faith responds by trusting in God.

Therefore, God gave him another believer. Here we find in action a fullness of the communion of the holy ones, the saints, in the holy things of God. Elijah traveled to where God had called him. Evidently, in commanding the widow to care for the preacher, God had not told her how He would give her what she needed. That may be gleaned from Elijah's testing to see if this was the widow who would care for him, and her responses.

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<sup>4</sup> *I Kings 17:9.*

Think about the realities of the text. The drought is real (there is extra-biblical historical proof of that for those who need it). Elijah is following the Word of the Lord. The widow has the command of God. There is not enough food – so the drought must have been going on a while. Without God’s intervention, this woman, her son, her household, and Elijah would starve to death. The first part she indicates with these words: *behold, I am gathering (a) couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for me and for my son, that we may eat it and die.*”<sup>5</sup>

She states the bare facts. But she does not indicate, in any way, that she thinks that God cannot give her all she needs to sustain herself, her son, household and the prophet. In fact, when she receives the mediated Word of God (Christ through the preacher) she acts in faith, for Faith responds by trusting in God, as our text proclaims:

*Then Elijah said to her, “Fear not! Go and do as you have said. Make for me (a) little cake first from it and cause to bring it to me, then make (some) for you and for your son afterward. For thus says YHWH, God of Israel, ‘The jar of meal will not be spent, and the cruse of oil will not fail until (the) day that YHWH gifts rain upon (the) face of the ground.’” Then she went and she did such as Elijah had spoken. And she and her household ate (for many) days.*<sup>6</sup>

There we hear how the Faith responds by trusting in God. Elijah trusted in God enough to go from the Promised Land to his people’s historical enemies. The widow trusted God enough to act on the words of the preacher. God cared for the preacher and the small number of believers in the land of the Gentiles through a

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<sup>5</sup> I Kings 17:12.

<sup>6</sup> I Kings 17:13-15.

multiplication of bread and oil, enough to meet their daily needs, until the time of God's punishment of sinners was over.

So it is to be for you, and for all believers. Hear the Word of God. Confess the faith. Care for one another as God gives us ability and means. (There's your tie to the Epistle for today). That includes supporting the bodies and lives of those who labor in the preaching and teaching of the Word. Just as that widow did during her world's time of economic collapse, Christians respond to the Faith by trusting in God. As it was for Elijah, the widow, her household in their time of need, so it will be for you who remain in Christ:

*(The) jar of the meal was not spent and (the) cruse of the oil did not fail, according to the Word of YHWH which He spoke through Elijah.<sup>7</sup>*

God is faithful. He will provide. If you doubt, look to Christ, who has given all for you. In Him, you are free to hold fast to the vows of the confirmand's good public witness, as Kennedy and Trevor did on Holy Saturday this year, and Max does today. Their confession stands into eternity: Faith responds by trusting in God.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Trinity XV (LSB One-year series)

I Kings 17:8-16; Galatians 5:25-6:10; Matthew 6:24-34

September 20, 2009

*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

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<sup>7</sup> I Kings 17:16.

*Then (the) Word of YHWH came to him, saying,<sup>8</sup>*

*“Arise! Go to Zarephath, to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold! I have commanded there (a) woman, (a) widow, to sustain you.”<sup>9</sup>*

*And he arose, and he went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, then behold, there (was a) woman, (a) widow. She was gathering sticks. And he called to her and caused to say, “Bring to me from (the) waters in (a) vessel, that I may drink.”<sup>10</sup>*

*Then as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring to me (a) piece of bread in your hand.”<sup>11</sup>*

*Then she said, “As YHWH lives, your God, I have no cake, only (a) handful of meal in (a) jar and (a) little oil in (a) cruse. And, behold, I am gathering (a) couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for me and for my son, that we may eat it and die.”<sup>12</sup>*

*Then he caused to say to her, Elijah, “Fear not! Go and do as you have said. Make for me from it (a) little cake first, and cause to bring it to me, then for you and for your son make (some) afterward.”<sup>13</sup>*

*“For thus says YHWH, God of Israel, ‘The jar of meal will not be spent, and the cruse of oil will not fail until (the) day that YHWH gifts rain upon (the) face of the ground.’”<sup>14</sup>*

*Then she went and she did thus as worded Elijah. And she and her household ate (for) days.<sup>15</sup>*

*(The) jar of the meal was not spent and (the) cruse of the oil did not fail, according to the Word of YHWH which He spoke through Elijah.<sup>16</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> I Kings 17:8.

<sup>9</sup> I Kings 17:9.

<sup>10</sup> I Kings 17:10.

<sup>11</sup> I Kings 17:11.

<sup>12</sup> I Kings 17:12.

<sup>13</sup> I Kings 17:13.

<sup>14</sup> I Kings 17:14.

<sup>15</sup> I Kings 17:15.

<sup>16</sup> I Kings 17:16.