

November 7, 2021
“In a Drought”
Psalms 146 / 1 Kings 17:8-16
Rev. John Pritchard

Um-mmm! How good to see you, and not just on a screen. I know and am glad that some of you are with us online, but I have to say to those who are here in person, how good, good, good to see you. It has been over a year and a half since I have seen any of you in person, so what a gift now.

And yet, what a year and a half—what a difficult time! A pandemic and surges; intensifying political polarization, affecting even common-sense health decisions, even for children; a flood—a flood—of gun violence; shockingly persistent police brutality against persons of color and active white denial of systemic racism; an all-out assault on women and their control of their own bodies; devastating wildfires, floods, and increasingly violent storms making evident the reality of climate change even while greenhouse gas emissions hit a record high and world leaders can't agree any significant steps; international saber rattling and cyber rattling; rising fascism worldwide, and the ever-widening gap between the obscenely wealthy and the desperately poor.

What a year and a half; what a time, during which some of you have known sickness; some have known losses; some have struggled—with loneliness, with work demands, with childcare, with finances. Calvary has struggled, with a mismatched pastoral appointment, with lessened income, with still unresolved building issues and struggles. What a year and a half; what a time now.

“Difficult” doesn't even begin to describe it. . . .

Which makes this time not far from the time we find in today's story of Elijah. There the primary problem is a drought, a bad drought, no rain, not even enough moisture in the air to leave any morning dew. Even the wadi Elijah finds to drink from dries up, and when the water goes, so too do crops and flocks.

Famine follows drought as predictably as night follows day. And as we've seen in our difficult time, our "drought," so there—the weight of the difficulty, the burden of the crisis, falls mainly on the backs of the most vulnerable—the sickly, the poor, those alone, all of whom in this story wear the faces of a poor widow and her dependent son, down now to their last meal, ready to share it and then to die.

Now, what strikes me most in the story is that God notices, them, the widow and her son, these two teetering on the edge of life, ready to fall into the abyss. God notices them, and by implication, others who are vulnerable, who are sickly, poor, teetering on the edge. God notices. The Psalm we read celebrates the character of God, saying that God keeps faith by executing justice for the oppressed, feeding the hungry, freeing prisoners, sighting the blind, lifting those bowed down, watching over strangers, upholding the widow and orphan. The Psalm celebrates the character of God, saying that God keeps faith by noticing, attending, the vulnerable, and in this story, we see that. In a difficult time, God notices this widow and her son, in their poverty, in their desperation; God notices.

As an aside, the story wants to make clear just how difficult that is, to notice. Not only do this widow and her son number among those readily overlooked, the invisible poor, but they also do *not* number among God's people, the people of Israel. They are foreigners, living in the city of Zarephath in Phoenicia, outside the scope of God's primary concern. You may remember another, later, story of a Phoenician woman, one who brought her daughter to be healed by Jesus. If you do, you'll remember how hard it was to see her as a person, even for Jesus, who called her a dog, telling her it is not fair to take the children's food and give it to dogs.

It is so hard to see and to see as people those who are invisible in their poverty, their desperation, their difference, and yet, God does, the God who keeps faith

by feeding the hungry, by watching over strangers, by upholding the widow and orphan. God notices, and more, God shows up. God shows up for the widow and her son in the person of the prophet. In their horrendous time, in their desperation, God shows up in the person of the prophet.

Now, I want to step back from the story for a just moment and simply sit with that. In a time akin to that in the story, in the “drought” we have been limping through, I want to just sit with that and ask, when has God shown up for you? When has God entered your struggle? In the person of whom or the guise of what? When or how has God shown up for you? Who or what is getting you through this time? Who or what is sustaining you? Who or what has been bringing you hope and courage and life? When has God noticed you, noticed your crisis—your despair, your frustration, your pain, your struggle—in this difficult time. When has God noticed and shown up for you, shown up for you in these driest of days?

Wherever, however, I hope you have noticed. I hope you continue to notice, to drink deep such a gift and to give thanks. I hope you notice, but for now, let's step back into the story where something else really strikes me. In the person of the prophet God shows up for the widow, but it is not as simple as God taking care of her, as God “fixing” what is wrong, as God making everything better, as God doing all the acting or giving and the widow receiving. Instead, God shows up, yes, and the widow is summoned.

“Bring me some water to drink and some bread to eat,” the prophet greets her, and even when she explains that she has only enough to prepare a last meal for her son and herself, after which they will simply die, the prophet still insists. “That’s fine,” he says, “but first bring me some.” Before you condemn the prophet’s selfish audacity, note that he asks her not to be afraid and adds a promise, God’s promise, that the widow’s resources will not run out until the drought has ended, this despite all appearances to the contrary.

There you have it. In the person of the prophet, God shows up and the widow is put on the spot, summoned to share what little she has left, summoned to move beyond fear, summoned to imagine, to trust, the seemingly impossible and to risk herself in that trust. In the widow's desperate time, God shows up and calls her to act.

Now again, for just a moment, I want us to step back from the story and question ourselves. In the very difficult time we find ourselves in, in our drought, how have you been summoned? What have you been called—or are being called—to do, to give, for yourself, for others? What have you been asked to imagine, to trust, to risk? Where have you been called to lay fear aside and dare beyond the thinkable, beyond the practical, beyond the reasonable? In this drought we are limping through, where has God shown up and summoned you?

Wherever, however, I hope you've been listening. I hope you are listening. I hope you know yourself as someone addressed, as someone with something to offer, to do, to give, as someone who need not be determined by fear but who can choose, can dare, more. I hope you hear the God who shows up and summons you.

Now, let's return to the story for one final thing. In it, the widow does—does trust, does dare, does share what little she has left, giving the prophet his bit of water and bread (or cake). The widow does, and God keeps faith—God upholds the widow and her son; the meal and oil to make bread do not run out; the little bit left lasts and lasts and continues to sustain them; the small amount, shared, becomes abundance.

What strikes me in that is how so little can feed them and feed them so long. What strikes me is the sustenance that can come from such a small bit. What

strikes me is that such a meager amount, shared, is enough, enough to go on, enough to keep going.

And that strikes me particularly today as we gather, whether virtually or in person, as we gather to share a “meal,” to share a tiny bit—a wafer or morsel and a sip—as we gather to find in so little enough, as we gather to taste in so little, shared, enough to keep us going, as we gather to know in our sharing the divine presence, the God who shows up in our drought, the God who summons us in our struggle, the God who keeps faith by executing justice for the oppressed, feeding the hungry, freeing prisoners, opening blind eyes, lifting those bowed down, watching over strangers, upholding the widow and orphan. From so little, shared, comes enough, enough to sustain us, enough to keep us going, enough to keep us living and hoping and daring the full life God yearns for us and for all. So little, shared, becomes abundance, enough for us all.

May we find it to be so today. May we find it to be so each day. And each day may we notice the God who shows up for us; may we hear the God who summons us; may we dare trust the God who is with us.

Amen.