

# Generosity Amidst Desperation

1 Kings 17:1-24

17 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

## Elijah Fed by Ravens

<sup>2</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: <sup>3</sup> “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. <sup>4</sup> You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there.”

<sup>5</sup> So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. <sup>6</sup> The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

## Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath



*Peasant Woman by Vincent Van Gogh 1853-1890*

<sup>7</sup> Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. <sup>8</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him: <sup>9</sup> “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” <sup>10</sup> So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” <sup>11</sup> As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

<sup>12</sup> “As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a

meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

<sup>13</sup> Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup> For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land.’”

<sup>15</sup> She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. <sup>16</sup> For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

<sup>17</sup> Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. <sup>18</sup> She said to Elijah, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?”

<sup>19</sup> “Give me your son,” Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. <sup>20</sup> Then he cried out to the LORD, “LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?”

<sup>21</sup> Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the LORD, “LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him!”

<sup>22</sup> The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. <sup>23</sup> Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive!”

<sup>24</sup> Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.”<sup>1</sup>

## Reflection

*She was a minor character in a great drama. We don’t even know her name. She was a person who suffered at the margins of society. Without husband or the help of extended family, she did what she could to scrape by. When she met Elijah, she was at the end of her rope, without food or hope for herself and her young son. She was from the same gentile country as Queen Jezebel. Her people were seaman. Might her husband have been a sailor lost at sea? Might she have been a foreign born immigrant or refugee alone in a strange country? Was her son an anchor child? She seemed to me to be a good woman. She was hospitable to Elijah even in her poverty.*

*Yahweh said to Elijah, “I have commanded the ravens to provide bread and meat for you by the brook.” When the brook later dried up, He said, “I have commanded a widow at Zarephath to provide you with food.” Raven and widow—both unwitting instruments of the Lord working in the food service industry and contributing to God’s transformation of society. Yet both considered unclean by the dominant Jewish culture. Jesus mentioned this unknown woman in favorable light 800 years later and almost got killed on the spot as a result.*

## Questions

1. Put yourself in the shoes of the widow, her son, and Elijah. Describe the thoughts and feelings of their desperation. When have you felt something similar?
2. The daily provision of flour and oil is like the provision of manna in the desert for the ancient Israelites. Are there any routine experiences of provision in your life that you attribute to the Lord?
3. The woman is the first fruit of revival in the days of Ahab. She was a destitute, foreign-born widow with a sick child who was able to testify for Elijah’s credibility as a man of God. Who might she represent in the world you serve?