

**"How to *Know* God Will Provide"**  
**(a first-person narrative)**  
**Sermon for the Second Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Lectionary Year C**  
**June 6, 2010**  
**Text: 1 Kings 17:8-34**  
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The Lord said to me, Elijah, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." That's what *God* said to me. That is how *God* planned to provide for me, his number one prophet (actually his one and only prophet), during the severe drought we were experiencing in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was going to send me to a foreign country, as hard hit if not more so by the drought, to be taken care of by a designated widow, the most marginalized of persons in that or any country. Widows just barely could take care of themselves when things were going well; they were the least likely group of people to be able to withstand the ravages of the lack of food and water resulting from a drought. And yet that was *God's* plan to provide for me.

Under other circumstances, I most assuredly would have put up a fuss. *God's* idea was almost the most ridiculous idea I ever had heard. Almost. Yet I knew that no matter how absurd the plan sounded on the face of it, it would wind up working. *God would* provide for me in this way. I had nothing to fear.

Was my lack of anxiety due to my great faith, given I was, after all, God's number one (actually his one and only) prophet? You might think so, but you would be wrong. My faith was no stronger than anyone else's, even yours. No, I *knew* God would provide for me, but it was for another reason, and I would like to share that reason with you.

In order to do that, I have to back up a little and tell you the story of what happened right before God sent me to the widow in Zarephath. God had told me to go to no less than the King of Israel, Ahab, better known as Queen Jezebel's husband, to announce a drought that was going to last just as long as God wanted it to last and no shorter. That meant it could go on indefinitely, until God was good and ready for it to be over, which, considering the bad mood God was in on account of what was going on in Israel at the time, wasn't going to be any time soon. That's the good news I shared with Ahab and then, like the smart prophet I am, I got out of town as fast as I could.

I waited for God to let me know how he was going to provide for me, his one and only prophet, during this bleak period. I imagined he would be sending me down to Egypt to bask in the sunshine on the bank of the River Nile, sipping on a tall frozen beverage of some kind and eating grilled dates stuffed with cheese and wrapped with bacon. Or maybe he'd send me up to Assyria, where I could choose to hang out either on the Tigris or the Euphrates, sampling local wines and feasting

on cuisine with a slight Asian fusion thing going on. That's pretty much what I expected.

What I got from God was nothing, absolutely nothing like that. Here is what he told me. Are you ready for this? I sure wasn't. God instructed me to go east, young man, to the Wadi Cherith. That was to be my source of water. Let's be clear about something. A wadi is just a nicer way of describing a creek. It isn't a lake, or a river, or a stream. It's only a step above a slough. And what's generally true of creeks during a drought? They dry up rather quickly, almost immediately after the sloughs do. And that's what was to be my watering hole.

But God wasn't finished describing his wonderful means of providing for me. That was the drink part; he then went on to the food part. I was going to have the distinct pleasure of being fed by ravens. That's right. Birds were to be doing my grocery shopping for the foreseeable future. Ravens were to be taking my meal orders. I could just picture some dirty, ugly black avian scavenger sidling up to me and asking politely, "Do you want fries with that?"

I hit the roof and gave God a piece of my mind. "I know you like to do things in a kind of weird, funky, not-even-close-to-conventional way. That's your style. But this is insanity. This is beyond strange. This is over-the-top, super-throw-down craziness. You are asking me

to go out in the middle of nowhere and trust that a creek is going to flow for more than a couple of days and birds are going to wait on me hand and foot. You are just flat loony tunes, God."

But I didn't really have a choice, so I went. I was hiding out, you see, because Ahab, like most deranged kings and queens tend to do, thought if he could get rid of the prophet who announced the bad news, he could get rid of the bad news itself. You know, kill the messenger. It never, ever, works that way, however. I got to the creek, and sure enough, there seemed to be a pretty steady flow of water, much more so than I had expected. And the next morning, about ten o'clock, the ravens came with fresh meat and a bagel. They came back about six o'clock with more meat and a dinner roll.

What I didn't know at the time but later discovered is that ravens just happen to be about the smartest birds on the planet and by far the best scavengers. They are pretty picky about their carrion, it seems, so they even have been known to lead wolves or coyotes to kill and then open up an animal of some kind so that the ravens, with little effort, can grab the freshest and choicest cuts of beef. So I ate rather well down by the wadside. As regular as clockwork the ravens came every day. They were so punctual, I would build my little fire and put my spit in place before they came, so I could cook what they brought me as soon as possible, and I have to say that they offered up

a pretty nice variety of meat and pastries from day to day. They took such good care of me that before long I, if they were even a few minutes late, I would start to pace back and forth in front of the fire, asking, "Okay, my fine feathered friends, what's the deal? It's ten after. Did you lose track of time? Where's the beef?"

In time, however, the creek did dry up. That's when God sent me up to Sidon, to the widow of Zarephath. And when God gave me those instructions, I didn't flinch. I didn't hesitate. I didn't ask questions. I just went. Why? Because as ludicrous as it sounded, I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that God could provide for me, even by means of a poor widow on her last legs herself. I knew, because I asked myself the question I had a feeling God was leading me to ask: "If God can provide for me with nothing more than a creek and ravens, why in the world should I doubt that he can provide for me with nothing more than a widow in a foreign country? Ravens worked just fine; surely a widow will as well."

How did I *know* God would provide for me, would take care of me, would meet my needs? *Because he already had.* That's how I knew. That's how any of us can know. We can know God will provide for us, even in unlikely ways, because when we look back, we can see clearly that God has done it, probably in equally unlikely ways if not more so, time and time again in the past. He *will* come through for us, because

he *has* come through for us, over and over and over. He always does. He always will. Of that we can be clear and certain and confident. That's how we can *know* God will provide.