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1 Kings 17:1-24
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Creating Spaces of Refuge and Rest

Early in my ministry here at Cascades, I found that I was in need of a space of refuge and rest. Though I truly love my calling as your pastor, it can be pretty demanding. And with the way the Church is changing and the role of pastoral vocations changing, one look at the job can make us feel ill equipped and unqualified to do everything that is expected.

I thank God for Larry and Beth Anderson. They created a space of refuge and rest for me in those early days. They would invite me over for lunch. Beth would make delicious but simple lunch. Larry would always invite me to taste his homemade beer that he disguised in green Sprite bottles. We would eat and talk. I knew I could be honest with about something with which I was wrestling. I always knew that they would shoot with me straight, tell me what I needed to hear...but with great love. The decision to challenge the congregation to begin the process of building this sanctuary was confirmed at their kitchen table.

I always walked away feeling loved for who I was, refreshed in my call, and informed of what I should do next. From their table I was charged to go out and do battle because spiritual leadership is hard work...especially when you encounter people who really don't want to go where you feel called.

The same was true of the prophet Elijah in our story today. He was tired. He was frustrated. He was feeling misunderstood. Ill equipped for the job set before him. He was in need of refreshment because the journey of spiritual leadership has left him weary.

Brene Brown, a popular TedTalker and a New York Times Bestselling author has spent the past two decades studying leadership, courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. Her latest book is feeding my soul. *Dare to Lead. Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts. Daring Greatly and Rising Strong at Work.*

She starts her book with a quote by Theodore Roosevelt:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man [or woman] who points out how the strong [person] stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the [person] who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again...who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high

achievement, and who at the worst, if [they] fail, at least fails while daring greatly.”¹

The prophet Elijah was such a leader when King Ahab was king of Israel. Ahab’s reputation was such that he did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of the terrible kings before him. He married Jezebel who enticed him to serve Baal and worship him. Ahab set up the temple of Baal in Samaria. “He did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than anyone else who preceded him.”² That’s quite a reputation.

As a prophet, Elijah spoke to Ahab on behalf of the Lord. And the word he brought wasn’t good. Because of Ahab’s evil, there would be drought in his kingdom for several years. Not a very happy word to receive.

Ahab was furious and Elijah is fleeing for his life.

Tired. Alone. Hungry. He had been in the arena too long, by himself. God sent him to the most unlikely place to be refreshed and strengthened for the ministry ahead. A poor destitute widow, a single mother, with just enough food to last them one more day before they would die of starvation.

Join me as we read from 1 Kings 17:1-24 and we see how God not only creates a space of refuge and rest, but also how we can see the handprint of Jesus Christ, though he is not even mentioned.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were golfing one day.

The first one to tee off is Moses. He smashes the ball and it is heading right for the water hazard before the green. Moses raises his club, the water parts, and the ball makes it to the green.

Jesus gets up to swing, cranks it out, and it is headed for the water hazard. Jesus closes his eyes and prays. The ball skips across the water and lands on the green two feet from the hole.

Elijah’s turn comes and he drives the ball. The ball looks like it is going to drop directly into the water.

A fish jumps from the water swallowing the ball, as an eagle drops from the sky, grabbing the fish. As the eagle flies over the green, a bolt of lightning strikes the eagle, making it drop the fish. As the fish hits the green, it spits out the ball and the ball falls into the hole, making a hole in one.

Jesus looks at Moses and Elijah, then to heaven and says, “That’s it! Dad you can stay home next time!”

¹ Theodore Roosevelt as quoted in Brene Brown, *Dare to Lead. Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts.* (Penguin Random House: New York, 2018), xviii.

² 1 Kings 17:

There are a couple of things that I'd like to lift up from this story that I believe will give us wisdom on how God creates spaces of refuge and rest through our times of feasting together and how we can create those kinds of spaces for others.

God sets the stage for his hospitality. We need to operate from a theology of abundance, not scarcity. We need offer what we do have, not what we do not. We need to understand that sometimes God provides in miraculous ways. We need to accept it when offered to us. We need to be open to be reciprocating the kindness shown to us in some way.

First, let's consider how God sets the stage for hospitality. The Latin root *hospes* means guest or stranger. The Latin root *patior* means to suffer. So when put together, a hospital is a place where guests or strangers who suffer can come to be cared for. Before public hospitals existed, monasteries in the middle ages provided this kind of place. Benedictine monasteries still provide a place of refuge and rest to soul weary guests. Mt. Angel Abbey Guesthouse just east of Salem, Oregon is one of my favorite places of escape.

But creating this kind of space can only come at God's invitation. We need to follow God's lead by listening as the Holy Spirit guides us. Inviting our guests into our homes is vulnerable for both guest and host. People see our real lives, behind closed doors. And in return, they are invited to be themselves. To come as they are, not as they should be. Unguarded. To let down one's hair so to speak.

Notice that not only does the Lord tell Elijah that he is to go to Zarephath of Sidon's house but God had already prepared her for Elijah's coming. In fact, we can tell that she was getting ready for him because she was out gathering sticks to fuel her fire when he showed up.

The next thing we see is how we need to operate from a theology of abundance, not a fear of scarcity. The widow looks at her bare cupboards and says, I don't have enough to live on...so how could I possibly share? Elijah, however, challenges her to look at what she does have. She does have water, a little flour and a little oil left. He says, "Prepare that and see how God provides."

My friends, God doesn't care so much of how much we offer in creating spaces of refuge and rest, but that we offer. Remember what we learned through our capital campaigns, "we are each called to give equal sacrifices, not equal gifts."

The widow's gift, though it is meager, is extremely sacrificial. It costs her a lot. This is the only food she and her young son have left to live off. Now that is scarce.

Remember the widow in the temple that Jesus points out who gave the two small coins in comparison to the gifts of other people? She gave from her poverty

all she had to live off.³ And Jesus lifts her up as an example of how each of us should give. Equal sacrifice, but not equal gifts.

We also see how God is faithful in return and provides in some miraculous ways as she does offer her food to Elijah. God multiples her flour and her oil. They don't run out.

Remember the story in the Gospels of Jesus feeding the thousands? It says that Jesus had compassion on the people because they were hungry, like sheep without a shepherd. When Jesus commanded his disciples to feed them, they replied out of a fear of scarcity. "Where are we going to get enough to do that? It's expensive and we couldn't not even begin to afford that task." Then a young boy steps up to the plate, teaches them about living out of abundance, and says, "Here, Jesus, take my lunch. Its only five small barley loaves and two fish. But you can have it."

We can almost hear the disciples sarcastically chuckle in disbelief, "Let's see this one!"

Jesus takes what is offered. Blesses it. Breaks it. Gives it to everyone there. Five thousand just counting the men, not including the women and children. And everyone eats until they are satisfied with twelve baskets full left over.⁴ What?

As we create spaces of refuge and rest, we need to not worry about what we will serve or how much we will serve. Just serve what we have. God will honor that offering and multiply it according to his good purposes to meet our needs.

There is a food cart in downtown Portland that is one of our family's favorite. Thai food. Karen often gets the Panang chicken curry and brings home the leftovers. I swear its an ending container because we could make at least two more meals out of it by adding more chicken, rice, and broccoli to what was left over. We were more than satisfied. All for \$8. Talk about a deal!

So the question we need to ask ourselves is "What do we have to work with?" And leave what we don't have out of the picture. Two very different ways of looking at the resources that God has placed at our discretion. One says we don't have enough so we need to preserve what we do have. The other says, we have something so we can use what we have.

Remember what I mentioned last week about having a theology of leftovers? I'd say that these stories are perfect examples of why we need that.

Next, I think this story encourages us to graciously accept hospitality when it is offered to us. We live in a day and age of fierce independence. As American's, we believe we should be able to take care of ourselves, provide for our selves, exist

³ Luke 21:1-4

⁴ Each of the Gospels recount this story of Jesus feeding the five thousand, though only John 6:1-14 records the fact the loaves and fish come from a young boy.

by ourselves, for as long as we possibly can. The truth is, however, that no person is an island that exists unto themselves. We were created to depend on one another, for relationship with other people. Even Jesus, the creator and sustainer of all things...who could live perfectly independently by himself...relied on the hospitality of others to create spaces of refuge and rest for him. We see many times how we stayed in Bethany just outside Jerusalem at the home of his friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha as he traveled to Jerusalem for Jewish festivals and holidays.

If Jesus could graciously except the kindness and hospitality of others, maybe we should be able to do the same.

The last thing I want to look at today in the story is how we need to be available should there come a time when we need to reciprocate the kindness we've been shown by others. We are told that sometime later Elijah is called to do just that. The woman's only son was sick and stopped breathing. So Elijah performs what to me seems like CPR. And he is brought back to life. This was a big deal for this widow back then, because without a male heir, her future would have been destitute. Her son was her one hope of survival. The one who would take care of her into her old age. And Elijah's reciprocal hospitality, ensures that.

I want to close with something that has little to do with hospitality or feasting but on the parallels between Jesus and Elijah. Where else do we hear about God providing miraculous for people who were hungry and in need? Or where people are raised from the dead? In the Gospels with Jesus. Though our story today doesn't explicitly mentioned Jesus, his finger prints are through out it.

When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I, the Son of Man, am?" they replied, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."⁵ But why Elijah?

Both spoke out in protest against the religious leaders of their day.

Both exercised command over the weather. Elijah by withholding and sending rain. Jesus by calming the seas.

Both multiply food for people.

Both raise people from the dead.

Both talked about sending their spirit to followers before they departed. Both exit this world through some pretty extraordinary ways. Elijah by chariot into the clouds. Jesus ascending into the skies.

Can we see why people thought he was Elijah?

⁵ Matthew 16:13-14

So may we listen to the Holy Spirit's invitation to both create for and accept hospitality from others. May we offer what we do have trusting the God will supply all that we need. And may we know that Jesus will be with us as we do so.