Last week, Rev. Jane Donnelly shared with us the story of the notable Old Testament prophet Elijah. We read about how Elijah was drawn into a spiritual contest alongside with 850 other false god prophets to see whose god is the real god. Even though he was clearly out-numbered, Elijah was never discouraged and was able to defeat the other prophets because he knew all along that the true God was on his side.

Elijah was the prophet commissioned during the reign of King Ahab. Ahab was an unfaithful and disobedient king. Influenced by his pagan worshipping wives, he led the people of Israel into idol worship and committed other forms of sins that were displeasing to God. Our story today picks us up at the scene where the prophet Elijah was summoned by God to go to Zarephath, the hometown of Queen Jezebel and the land of pagans.

Elijah knew what he was getting himself into…kind of like being thrown into the belly of a beast, deep into the enemy’s territory. In spite of his uncertainties, Elijah focused on God’s mission rather than his. He was being sent there to preach the message of hope and salvation to a people who needed to hear the most. These were people who have distanced themselves from God for generations or have been neglected and marginalized by society. Many of them didn’t even know who the true God of Israel was. **Part of Elijah’s seemingly “mission impossible” was to lift up the voices of those who are voiceless and to deliver hope to those who were hopeless.**

 Furthermore, in addition to the spiritual vacancy and the many idolatry practices that this community was dealing with, this community had other more practical problems and concerns to deal with as well. There was a severe drought going on for many years, kind of like the one that the western part of the US has experienced for the past couple of years. Food and water were becoming scarce, and likewise their morals and their faith and relationship with the true God were becoming non-existent.

 It was under these many challenging circumstances that Elijah was sent onto this mission. This was a mission not to the King but to the common people, the widows, the orphans, the poor, the sick, and the dying. They were the ones who needed God the most. In our story today, God led Elijah to this nameless widow and her child represented a population of those who are the most vulnerable, marginalized and defenseless.

 This widow whom we read in our story today so desperate for survival. She was found gathering sticks in the field so that she may prepare her final meal with her son, with whatever that she has left…that’s how desperate she was. But God sent Elijah to this widow and her child in the right place and at the right time, as an agent of hope. Elijah delivered to them a message of hope reassuring them *not to be afraid or to worry about the future. For the jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not run out until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth.*

This story would’ve had a nice ending right here, however, there was more. This widow had a deeper issue that she had to deal with besides being fed physically and spiritually. Her child was very sick and was on death bed. Elijah felt sympathetic towards the widow and the child. He took the son upstairs and pleaded to the LORD for mercy that he may be revived. The LORD had compassion towards the widow and revived her son. Upon seeing her son was revived to life, the widow went out rejoicing and praising God before others.

 Through this story, God demonstrated that God remains faithful upon those who had kept their faith and trust in Him, especially those who are powerless and voiceless, those who are vulnerable and marginalized by society.

 Come to think of it, I’m sure we all can think of someone who resemble this widow and the dying child. They could be our neighbors, our friends, our co-workers, some whom we may pass by on the street, or they might even be one of us. Don’t we all know someone who needed to hear God’s message of hope right now. Perhaps we can be that agent, like Elijah, to deliver that message of hope to those who need to hear the most. We all look for the good news to be brought to us, in the midst of a desperate or a dire situation. Or it could be someone who fell victims of domestic violence, abusive relationship, gun, drugs and alcohol related issues, bullying in and outside of school, or someone who had been ostracized by the rest of the community and needed to get him or herself back on the feet.

One time I had a unique opportunity to visit across the US-Mexican border in the town of Juarez in Mexico, which is located right across from El Paso, TX. The purpose of our group’s visit was to see for ourselves first hand and to learn about the many social issues and economic struggles that Juarez was facing. This was the town that Pope Benedict made a visit earlier this year to address many of the same issues. For many years, Juarez was considered one of the most dangerous cities to live in North America because of the Mexican drug cartels. Drug, sex, human trafficking, domestic child/spouse abuses, street gang violence and murder just to name a few…not to mention the extreme economic disparity that notoriously labeled the city for many years.

As part of our visit, we were guided by a couple of local pastors who not only showed us their churches but they also brought us to a local women’s clinic where many of the women could come to receive helps in both physical, emotional and mental cares as they needed. These women were the silent voices who fell victims to the domestic violence and abuse in their home by their husband or boyfriends or others. Some may have been abandoned by their husband and became single mother who was often ostracized by their own community, and perhaps even their own family. Some had no choice but to serve as part of the sex slaves and prostitutes in order to pay for their debts.

All of us were so touched upon hearing several of the women’s personal stories and the struggles that they had to go through. Personally this was an eye-opening and heart-disturbing experience for me. How could this be happening right across from our own backyard? These were literally our next door neighbors, families who were divided across the border that are now living a world apart and divided by a 40-foot tall wall.

As a community of faith, we have an obligation and a commitment to bring this message of hope and justice upon all of God’s children. Our text this morning reminds us of just that....that there are people who are still suffering today, right in our own backyard. We need to wake up and stop denying that this is someone else’s problem and not ours! **This is a human race problem where you and I can be a part of the solution.** The same God who cares and provides for our everyday needs also grants us compassion and hope to the widows and orphans as well.

 In spite of many critics against faith and religion, we shall see that people’s lives are continued being transformed and renewed each day. Hopes are still being lifted up in the midst of dire circumstances. We must make space for God’s grace to work among us through limitless possibilities. We must let the wind of the Spirit steer our ship instead of us attempting to direct God’s mission in this world. It is only through the leading of the Holy Spirit where we CAN be the strength upon those who are vulnerable and the weak. We CAN be friends among those who are friendless and strangers. ***For we are no longer strangers and aliens, we are fellow citizens and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.[[1]](#footnote-1)***

 Jesus said, ***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*** In deed we have been blessed among many things, way beyond our expectations, it’s time that we open our eyes and open our hearts to identify the “widows and orphans” or anyone who might feel left alone among us.

In the same way, as we later on gather around this table of grace, even though we may not be worthy to be at the same table, nevertheless, we are all invited to come and to seek God’s grace. We proclaim that we are never alone. God has not abandoned us. As we take this bread of life and drink from this cup of salvation and hope, we shall be reminded of God’s saving grace upon all of God’s children. Jesus shall reign wherever the Sun.

As another Old Testament prophet – Micah, who reminded us that each of us have our calling, as God’s faithful prophets to God’s people, that we are to ***do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God?[[2]](#footnote-2)***

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. *Ephesians 2:19-20* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Micah 6:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)