

Scraping the Bottom

From the Perspective of the Widow:

Good Morning,

I am pleased to be here with you this morning, as my story is often told from the perspective of Elijah and not my own. You see before this stranger ever appeared at the gate of Zarephath, my hometown, I had already been speaking with God. The Holy One had come to me in a dream, informing me that someone was coming, and I should do as this visitor said. I didn't get a lot of information, but I was pretty certain this was direction was from on high. That was helpful because Elijah didn't give a ton of details either.

Maybe I should tell you a little about my town. I don't know if any of you have visited before. Zarephath is a city near Sidon, on the Phoenician coast. Northwest of the Sea of Galilee, if that's an area you know. King Ahab, son of Omri, is currently King over Israel. Judah and Israel are divided each having their own monarch. Anyway, Ahab is married to Queen Jezebel. Jezebel is from Sidon, so basically from these parts. Jezebel, as a good Sidonian worships Baal, like pretty much everyone around here. Baal is the god of storm and rain. So, you can imagine the irony in there being a drought right now, especially since Jezebel has Ahab and many others making all sorts of sacrifices to Baal.

Elijah, before he ever came here told King Ahab that there would be a drought because of King Ahab's worship of Baal. I think he was trying to appease his wife, but maybe he should have tried something else! After Elijah made that little announcement he went into hiding by the Wadi Cherith, where he said he was able to drink and eat – the ravens brought him bread and meat. But because of the drought, he had to move on when the wadi dried up. I guess that was about when I had the dream that he was coming, and he heard God telling him to come here.

I was out by the gate that morning, collecting sticks. Even though I had faith in God, I didn't see many signs of hope. The sticks I was collecting, I would use to build our last fire. My husband died many years ago, and my son is all I have left in this world. Yet, I don't have enough flour and oil to feed him. I went to get the sticks, knowing good and well that would be our last meal together, we would go to sleep, not have another meal, and would starve to death like so many others have and will. So, when this stranger approached me at the gate, I was lost in my thoughts, sadness, resignation. I was scraping not only the bottom of my jar of meal, but the bottom of my resolve, the bottom of my courage and strength. I was giving up.

I'm sure you've experienced times in your life, when you weren't sure you had anything left to give, any will to go on. I had this lingering promise and dream from God, but it seemed too late. Then this guy asks for water. Didn't he know we were in the middle of the drought! Then he asked for bread. So I let him have it: "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die."

It dawned on me after he was speaking that he was the one God had sent. So I did as he asked. I admit I wasn't sure he knew how to make a little cake or how much meal was required. But I did as he asked, and discovered that even when I thought I was scraping bottom, there always seemed to be more than I

thought. I had enough to feed Elijah and my son and myself. As Elijah foretold, the jar actually never ran out. There was always a little more oil. And we ate for many days.

You may have thought the meal and oil was a miracle. It probably was. But I think the fact that Elijah and I both listened to God's voice was a miracle. When I was scraping the bottom of my reserves, God gave me strength to welcome a stranger – that's a miracle! I am a widow with a small child, which means people are supposed to help look out for me, but when others are too busy worrying about their own livelihood, they don't often have the emotional space to consider there may be someone struggling worse than them. Elijah helped me to stop wallowing in my despair and get beyond my own fears.

As someone who was accustomed to receiving from others, I don't often have the luxury of caring for someone else, but I made that cake for Elijah, and that felt like something of a miracle in getting to serve a new friend.

In my experience, God often shows up when I gather at the table. With my son, the table is often when I hear about what he's thinking and feeling. At the table, I feel my own fears and worries healed a bit, a peace settles in my spirit in a way that's unexplainable. Sitting at the table, I felt my faith being restored, I felt my heart and disappointment mending.

You know, I probably should have been a little afraid of welcoming in Elijah, since he had already spoken against King Ahab. Jezebel has many friends in town, and I'm sure they got word to her about my taking in this prophet. She's known for having prophets killed, and I would think this one would be at the top of her list! It's sad to me how when people are grabbing at power and trying to seize control, they seem to go after those who are trying to do something good. I was simply providing sanctuary and food, but I'm sure that made me a target too. So maybe another miracle is that we didn't have any officers trying to raid our town and beat down my door.

We should beware of ways those in power become intoxicated by their ability to inflict pain. As people of God, it is our moral imperative to speak out and resist, even when it's the government we are opposing. Can you even imagine that in some places people are treated like animals, caged, starved, not given care? Genocide, whether an order to kill babies by throwing them into the Nile or an order to obliterate villages, an order to rape protesters, an order to not allow prisoners the decency to wash or an order to create concentration camps...is nothing short of evil. These are signs of drought too, maybe not of rain, but of human decency and compassion.

We serve a God who invites us to use all that we have, even as we scrape the bottom to feed those who are hungry. We serve a God who invites us to use our resources, our willpower, our voices to speak out and resist injustice, especially advocating for widows and children. My story of God coming through at a table, through an interaction with a stranger, turning scarcity into abundance, and undermining the political powers that be, should be an example for what God can do.

Maybe God is calling you too. Maybe you have felt like you were scraping the bottom or maybe you know you've got more to give. Whatever your circumstance, I hope you will give it everything you've got. When you do, trust me, God provides and shows up in ways you never even imagine!

I pray that you find this to be so. Amen.