

by the saintly truth that we might as well love. Because in the end, that matters more than just about anything else.

The widow's action may not look like love on the surface. But I can think of a lot of other things she could have done besides cook up a cake for the wandering prophet who showed up on her doorstep. She could have cursed him out. She could have thrown him out. She could have shamed him. But she listened to Elijah, and then she offered him hospitality. She showed love, patience, and care through her actions. And then, just a few verses later in her story, she makes her trust in God clear.

This is a big week ahead, my friends. You know the election is coming on Tuesday. You know the stakes, as well as your own anxiety and hopes. So as we go into this week, I am praying these things:

God, help me to be a saint, too.

God, help me to be patient and brave and true, and even to toil and live and die for the God I know and love.

God, help me to trust in your provision as passionately and boldly as Elijah did.

God, when things are bleak, or the facts of life don't look too rosy, help me to be like the widow. Help me to take the risk of serving and trusting in you anyway.

God loves us boldly. God provides for us endlessly. So we might as well embrace our calling as the saints of God. We might as well live - boldly, faithfully, generously. And we might as well love.

All glory and honor, thanks and praise be to God. Amen.



November 3, 2024
All Saints' Celebration
"Might as well love"
Rev. Emma Nickel
Scripture: 1 Kings 17:1-16

The children sang today about the saints of God: those who toiled and fought and lived for the Lord they loved and knew. The song ends with the reminder that all of those saints were just "folks like me." For Presbyterians, saints are just people who try to live their lives *in* faith and *with* faith.

We meet two saints in our scripture today: Elijah and a widow who lived in Zarephath, whose name we unfortunately do not know. The contrasting picture of these two people helps us see how saints come in the bodies, personalities, and faith of very different people. Which maybe helps us see our own reflections and reminds us that we are saints, too.

Elijah pops up for the first time in the verses we read today. No introduction, just the appearance of this powerful prophet who heard directly from God and spoke those words to the King. Elijah's life and work were marked by an incredible trust in the power and provision of God. He ministered amid people who worshiped other gods. And yet he never swayed from his ultimate trust in the God of Israel, the God we know as the God of Jesus Christ. From trusting that the birds themselves would feed him at the start of the drought and famine, to believing that a widow whose pantry was bare would be able to sustain him, Elijah put his faith in God to get him through, no matter what. And God absolutely sustained him and provided for him, and for the widow's household, too. Elijah's deep trust in God feels very saintly.

Then, there was the widow in Zarephath. She was a saint, too, even though her life and faith were not at all like Elijah's. When Elijah appeared in the middle of a terrible famine and commanded her to cook him some food, she basically said, "Mister, are you crazy?! There is no food left anywhere." This woman was not a fool. She was practical and honest. She had enough food left for just one small meal for herself and her son, and then she knew they were going to die from hunger. She didn't pull any punches; she just stated the facts of her life. But when Elijah told the woman not

1 From *Sorry For Your Troubles* by Pádraig Ó Tuama (Canterbury Press Norwich, 2013).

to be afraid, to go ahead and share what she had anyway, she did it. She demonstrated her growing trust through her actions.

There's an Irish poet, Padraig o Tuama, who is also a conflict mediator, theologian, and peacemaker. His poem, "The Facts of Life" has spoken to many people. It's a little long, but I think it's worth hearing all of it. "The Facts of Life"¹ goes like this:

That you were born
and you will die.

That you will sometimes love enough
and sometimes not.

That you will lie
if only to yourself.

That you will get tired.

That you will learn most from the situations
you did not choose.

That there will be some things that move you
more than you can say.

That you will live
that you must be loved.

That you will avoid questions most urgently in need of
your attention.

That you began as the fusion of a sperm and an egg
of two people who once were strangers
and may well still be.

That life isn't fair.
That life is sometimes good
and sometimes better than good.

That life is often not so good.

That life is real
and if you can survive it, well,
survive it well
with love
and art
and meaning given
where meaning's scarce.

That you will learn to live with regret.
That you will learn to live with respect.

That the structures that constrict you
may not be permanently constraining.

That you will probably be okay.

That you must accept change
before you die
but you will die anyway.

So you might as well live
and you might as well love.
You might as well love.
You might as well love.

The widow knew the facts of life. The famine in her land was not of her own choosing. Her vulnerable place in society meant she was hit hardest of all. She had accepted that she was going to die, maybe sooner than she had expected. But this man of God was telling her to cook the food she had right away, and even to share it. She heard him say the jar of meal would not run out and the jug of oil would not run dry. She knew the facts. And she decided that, in light of it all, she might as well live, and she might as well love. So she cooked the food. She shared it with her son and with Elijah. She took a huge leap of faith to trust in this man and his God, instead of only in the facts in front of her. Taking a risk to trust God, even when you aren't totally sure, is also a saintly thing to do.

Today we are giving thanks for the saints we know who have died and gone to claim God's promises ahead of us. Some of them were saintly like Elijah, speaking their faith out loud, boldly following God's ways. Some of them may have had more in common with the widow. They may have suffered greatly or been bound by the facts of their lives. Their faith may have come late or been riddled with doubts. But I bet most of them lived