

# SERMON FOR JUNE 9, 2013

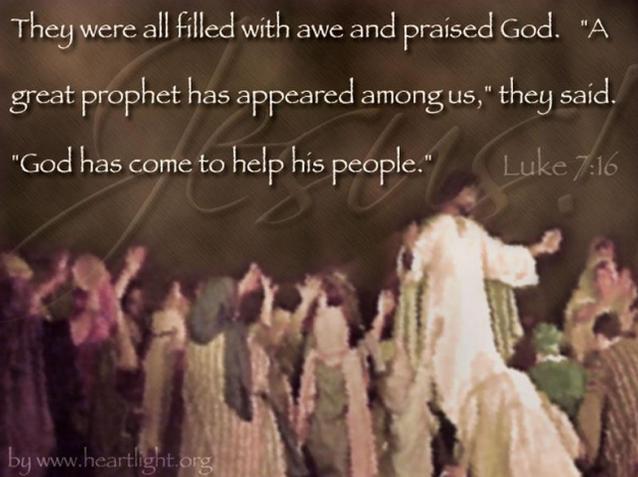
The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: **1 Kings 17:8-24 (Focus); Luke 7:11-17**

Message: **"GOD's Healing Aloha is Infinite!"**

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## Gathering in the Word

The Sundays after Pentecost (now to November 24, 2013) is a time for the Church (all of us) to reimagine and re-enact the Church as a movement that is unrestrained by old patterns or by the rule of fearful authorities.

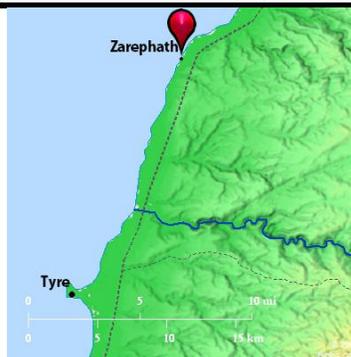
Today's Bible lessons from 1 Kings and Luke 7 assert and emphasize for us that **having faith opens us up to new dimensions of reality**—and within these dimensions—**miraculous releases of divine energy, congruent and in harmony with the laws of nature—are released!**

**Our willingness to trust GOD despite appearances around us opens us to new possibilities and new energies and a greater sense of vocation!** Our willingness to trust GOD is not a denial of the harsh realities of life that we experience again and again—but let us remember—that these realities are not the whole story!

GOD's gentle providence and divine intervention brings and provides us possibilities where we only see limitations! Our lives at times are full of hurt and tragedy that moves us to seek healing and restoration—because so very often we find the same words escaping from our lips from both 1 Kings and the Gospel of Luke!

## Hearing the Word

**1 Kings 17:8-24 (THE VOICE BIBLE)**



<sup>8</sup> The Eternal One gave him this message:

**Eternal One:** <sup>9</sup> Get up, and travel to Zarephath. It is in the possession of Sidon, *which is outside Israel*. Remain there, *and do not leave for any reason*. There is a widow in Zarephath whom I have told to take care of you.

<sup>10</sup> Elijah got up and *immediately* traveled to Zarephath. He arrived at the city gate, and at that moment, a widow was picking up sticks nearby.

**Elijah:** Please bring me some water in a jar to quench my thirst.

<sup>11</sup> (as she fetched the water) Also, could you please bring me a piece of bread?

**Woman:** <sup>12</sup> As certain as the Eternal One, your True God lives, I don't have any bread. *In fact, I am starving*. I don't have anything except for a bit of flour in a bowl and a few drops of oil in a jar. I was gathering sticks *when you arrived to make a fire* so that my son and I could eat one last bite of food and then die. *It's all over for us*.

**Elijah:** <sup>13</sup> *I assure you that it's not over for you yet*. Don't be afraid. Continue what you were doing, but make a small bread cake for me first, and bring it here to me. Then you and your son may eat your own bread cakes. <sup>14</sup> This is the message of the Eternal God of Israel: "The flour and the oil will not run out until the moment when the Eternal showers the earth with rain."

<sup>15</sup> She did exactly as Elijah had instructed her to do, and everyone who lived in her house had food for days. <sup>16</sup> The bowl of flour and the jar of oil did not run out, just as the Eternal had said through Elijah. <sup>17</sup> A little while later, the son of the woman, the house's mistress, grew *fatally* ill. His illness grew so intense that eventually he stopped breathing; *he was dead*.

**Woman (to Elijah):** <sup>18</sup> *Why did this happen? What wickedness have I committed against you, man of God? Are you here as a reminder of past sin? Is that why my son died?*

**Elijah:** <sup>19</sup> Bring your son to me.

Elijah then took the dead boy out of her arms, carried him upstairs to his own room, and laid him on his own bed.

**Elijah:** <sup>20</sup> O, my True God, the Eternal, have You brought this tragic death upon the son of the widow who is looking after me? *If so, why would You do this to a woman who is serving You?*

<sup>21</sup> Elijah stretched himself out over the boy three different times, and he cried out to the Eternal again.

**Elijah:** O my True God, the Eternal, I beg you to bring this boy back to life.

This incredible act by the Eternal One is not only for the benefit of giving back the woman's son so he could help with the support of the family, but it is also to demonstrate God's powerful hand on Elijah.

<sup>22</sup> The Eternal heard Elijah's plea, and the boy was brought back to life. <sup>23</sup> Elijah brought the boy back down to his mother *who was waiting anxiously* in the house.

**Elijah:** Your son lives again.

**Woman (rejoicing):** <sup>24</sup> I now *fully* trust that you are a man of God and that the truth of the word of the Eternal dwells in your mouth.

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Today's story of Elijah and the widow is not so much different from how things happen even today. GOD directs the Prophet Elijah to the *Brook Cherith* (a stream or river) where his life is

nourished and sustained by the fresh water and the miracle ravens (*related to crow family*) who bring Elijah bread. But the drought hits the whole region and the very same *Brook* that had been Elijah's source of nourishment dries up; so Elijah ends up in the town of **Zarephath** and lives with a widow and her son. Elijah's presence is a Godsend and blessing to the woman.

As our story opens, the woman is gathering sticks to build a fire to cook her last meal that she and her son will eat before starving to death—that's how dire things are! Elijah's presence with them saves the day—the flour and the oil used to make bread—go on and on and on during those bleak times of drought and famine and so the widow, her son, and their special house guest remain well fed.

Then one day the boy gets sick and dies.

- ✓ But if GOD is able to keep the flour and oil going, can GOD do something here as well? The widow asks WHY?
- ✓ Did GOD bring Elijah to her so she can suffer more?
- ✓ Elijah didn't know.
- ✓ The mother didn't know.

What **is** revealed in our story is that:

- ✓ GOD is present!
- ✓ GOD is listening!
- ✓ GOD can act!

Miracles in the Bible—never means that all suffering ends in the here and now—but point us to God's dearest intention of bring about a kingdom and realm where all will be well! **Such miracles are indeed signs, arrows, and pointers to where GOD's heart is! And GOD's heart is fixed on a return to SHALOM!**

**Luke 7:11-17 ~ THE VOICE BIBLE**

<sup>11</sup> It wasn't long after this when Jesus entered a city called Nain. Again all of His disciples accompanied Him, along with a huge crowd. <sup>12</sup> He was coming near the gate of the city as a corpse was being carried out. This man was the only child *and support* of his widowed mother, and she was accompanied by a large funeral crowd. <sup>13</sup> As soon as the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her.

**Jesus:** Don't weep.

<sup>14</sup> Then He came to the stretcher, and those carrying it stood still.

**Jesus:** Young man, listen! Get up!

<sup>15</sup> The dead man immediately sat up and began talking. Jesus presented him to his mother, <sup>16</sup> and everyone was both shocked and jubilant. They praised God.

**Funeral Crowd:** A tremendous prophet has arisen in our midst! God has visited His people!

<sup>17</sup> News of Jesus spread across the whole province of Judea and beyond to the surrounding regions.

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The story from Nain

## **Doing the Word**

So what is the Word of God for us?

### **1. ONE: MIRACLES BY GOD IN OUR LIVES NEVER MEAN THAT ALL SUFFERING ENDS—BUT DO POINT TO GOD’S DEAREST INTENTION OF BRINGING ABOUT A KINGDOM WHERE ALL WILL BE WELL.**

- ✓ GOD’s miracles are indeed signs, arrows, and pointers to us as to where the heart of GOD is!
- ✓ GOD’s heart is fixed on a return to shalom—  
*Completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, the absence of agitation or discord!*
- ✓ **We can TRUST GOD for that!**

### **2. TWO: BLESSINGS FOLLOW TRAGEDIES AND SOMETIME TRAGEDIES FOLLOW BLESSINGS!**

- ✓ Lots of things happen around us all the time that we can’t explain; much less understand!
- ✓ Sometimes the inexplicable (*mysterious, incomprehensible, strange, bizarre*) happenings around us like sudden illnesses and death—happen and we are left to make sense of them; crying out to GOD for an answer and for help but not always getting either one!
- ✓ **We can TRUST GOD!**

### **3. THREE: WE ARE REMINDED AGAIN THAT THE RESTORATION PROJECT OF JESUS’ LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION MAKES ALL THINGS POSSIBLE FOR YOU AND ME!**

- ✓ These and other miracles in the Bible and around us today are foretastes of GOD's Kingdom & realm—not the fullness itself!
- ✓ As we all do our ministry here at TFCCCH in Jesus' name—we should expect that as a result of our praying—some sick people will be healed, some fractured marriages will be reconciled, that some prodigal sons and daughters will return home, some Christian businesspeople will succeed wildly and earn lots of money. And when these things happen and when the Church subsequently praises GOD for answered prayers and for golden opportunities and for the divine providence that makes all things possible—the Church is not wrong to attribute such gifts and such instances of GOD's goodness! Of course, we will still attend funerals of people we prayed for; some people will lose jobs or get laid off.
- ✓ We Christian will have bad days!
- ✓ Luke 7 reminds us that we can be grateful to follow a Savior with the power to raise the dead! Seeing and reading this does give us hope—and that's enough!

### **Sent in the Word**

One of my professors at Fuller Seminary, Lewis Smedes, wrote some years ago—that it is natural for us to want healing for ourselves and certainly, for those we love. It's natural also to pray for such things as well—we've all done that! But Dr. Smedes also sees a spiritual danger in reducing our Christian life to mostly an exercise in seeking greater ease, comfort, and healing. Perhaps that kind of focus blinds us to the *unalleviated* suffering that is all around us—particularly among the very same poor and disenfranchised people who occupied such a central place in Jesus' own ministry!

Jesus got close to people who lived on the margins of society:

- ✓ Jesus got touched by menstruating women.
- ✓ Jesus touched dead bodies.
- ✓ Jesus touched “unholy” lepers.
- ✓ All these were not healings of the already well-off performed from some safe distance—Jesus was close enough to touch all of them or for people to touch Jesus!

**LET US BE LIKE JESUS!**

**LET US GO TO ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE IN ORDER TO SHOW THEM THAT GOD LOVES THEM WHETHER WE CAN SOLVE THEIR EVERY ILL OR NOT!**

**Amen? AMEN!**

