

14th February 2021

Elijah and the widow of Zarephath 1 Kings 17:8-24

In our service this morning we thought about the Wow! moment when Peter, James and John saw Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus in glory on top of a mountain. This evening, we are looking at another Wow! event involving Elijah, this one hundreds of years before Jesus was born.

Our story starts with a widowed woman living in land where it has stopped raining so the grain won't grow and there is very little food around. With no husband to provide for her and her son, she has no hope and no expectation of things getting better, she is planning to cook the last of her food and then die.

Elijah the prophet was from Israel, he had told people that the drought was coming, and then at God's instruction had gone to a land where people worshipped a god called Baal – in the following chapter of 1Kings he has an amazing battle with the prophets of Baal. But for now, like everyone else, he is hungry. A hungry foreigner in a land with no food, but unlike the widow Elijah has something to hope in he knows that God is with him.

Elijah asks the woman for a drink, she can spare some water so she agrees, but as she goes to fetch it he asks for some food too. That puts her in a tricky position, she had her plan, she was ready to die, but this man who she recognises as being a man of God says that if she brings him a snack then her flour and oil will not run out until it rains again. That's got to be worth a try, no matter how hopeless her position has been the idea that things might be ok and that she and her son might survive must be amazing so she does as he asks and amazingly the flour bin and the oil jar are not empty afterwards, there is always enough for another meal for her and her son. Her faith in Elijah is rewarded not simply with food, but with life itself.

How amazing is that? God not only provides food for the widow and her son, but He carries on providing throughout the drought. Wow!

But, the story doesn't end there, and the widow finds herself despairing once again, her son, her hope for the future, dies. She blames Elijah at first, but recognising an opportunity to once again demonstrate God's power Elijah takes the boy's body, stretches himself over it and prays and God restores the boy to life. Whether this is, as some suggest, the earliest example of resuscitation we don't know, but we do know Elijah prayed and that the boy was restored. After this, the woman says to Elijah that now she knows he speaks for God. Wow!

This is an incredible story, so much is packed into just a few verses.

- It is the first time a man of God is directed to go to gentiles to minister to them, even Jesus said that at the time of the story there were many hungry widows in Israel (Luke 4:25-26), but God had sent Elijah to this particular widow.

- Two miracles happen in the life of this woman, who wasn't – at the start of the story – a believer, she is provided with food and the resurrection of her son. That's really got Wow! factor.

But none of us lives in a land with a drought and a famine, so what can we learn from this.

I think we can learn that 3 things:

God cares for all people, not just those who are inside his chosen nation or his church, and not just those that do big things – the widow was an ordinary person willing to get a drink of water for a thirsty man.

God can be trusted, from a human point of view there was no reason for Elijah to travel to Zarephath but he did what God asked of him and was given an opportunity to show God's love in an extraordinary way.

And finally, as well as being a God who cares and who can be trusted,

God can make us go Wow! Elijah provided bread and new life to the astonishment of the widow. But we can see that he is the forerunner of Jesus who provides the bread of life and the promise of eternal life if we trust Him and, like Elijah, are prepared to do what He asks of us.