

The stories we read in the Bible this morning reveal to us the power of God's Word and how that Word can lift us up in body, mind, and spirit. That's what we're going to talk about: The power of this Word and what it has to do with our walk with God and one another.

OPENING PRAYER

In the Old Testament reading from 1st Kings 17 we found Elijah living with a widow and her son. There had been a drought but the Lord in his mercy had provided Elijah and the woman and her son with flour and oil which never ran out. But then there was another harrowing crisis!

This is a good example of how God's children experience problems in their lives just like everyone else. We all experience suffering and loss and conflict, depression, sorrow, and sickness. However, the Lord shows us how in the midst of whatever heartache we're experiencing, that he never leaves us, and in fact he lifts us up and satisfies our deepest needs.

As regards the story of Elijah and the widow and her son: **1st Kings 17:17-18:** **"...the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. ¹⁸ And she said to Elijah, 'What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!'"**

As we see elsewhere in the Scripture, sickness and death are often associated with punishment for sin. Here in this story the woman immediately jumped to the conclusion that her sin must've been the reason for her son's death. Indeed, she did not deny that she was a sinner, nor did she try to justify herself. She didn't even become angry with God. However, she did question the value of providing housing for Elijah!

The story continues: **1st Kings 17:19-20:** **"(Elijah) said to her, 'Give me your son.' And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. ²⁰ And he cried to the LORD, 'O**

LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?"

Consider how Elijah responded to the woman's request: He wasn't pretentious and he wasn't defensive. But he was humble. And he went straight to God to make things right. Imagine his embarrassment, that his host's son had died!

Elijah carried the boy into his room. He didn't even know what was going to happen, but he prayed nonetheless: **"O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?"**

Using modern jargon, Elijah was saying, "O Lord my God, this is a bad scene! I don't get it! And now it's on you to make it right!"

From this passage, here's a teaching about prayer: Be yourself when you come to God and let him know how you're feeling. The prophets illustrated this kind of transparent dialogue with God all the time. They revealed their heart, believing that the Lord cared for them. They walked in faith.

The story goes on: **1st Kings 17:21-24: "Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, 'O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again.' ²² And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. ²³ And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, 'See, your son lives.' ²⁴ And the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the Word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.'"**

Notice how direct Elijah was; he was forceful; he expressed himself without holding back. There was nothing vague about Elijah's prayer. And he didn't beg. But he told God what he needed.

Then he stretched himself over the boy 3-times. This is like the more traditional approach of the laying on of hands, but more dramatic. Indeed, Elijah did everything with a sense of high drama.

In a sense, we should consider the whole ministry of the Lord as high drama, even in our own lives. For when God brings us healing in our minds, in our bodies, or in our hearts, whatever happens is transformative. And what could be more dramatic than a transformed life?

When the woman's son was raised from the dead, she cried out, "**Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.**" As it turned out the boy's death was not because of sin, but that God's Word would be glorified.

The Lord lifted up the young man who was dead. He lived. And the woman was lifted up too. She was encouraged in her heart, a heart filled to overflowing with joy. And Elijah was strengthened. In the midst of these three lives God's Word—a word of life, of Spirit, and of hope—was glorified.

In this story we learned about the power of prayer and how God's Word is interwoven with it. The woman called Elijah a "**man of God**" for he wielded God's Word in a way that brought hope, healing, and renewal. This good work validated the Word which Elijah proclaimed.

As we master God's Word we're able to pray just as Elijah did, that is, with confidence and courage: Confidence that our God is the God of life and he desires to lift us up, and courage that despite the naysayers and our own doubts, God will do for us just as he has promised to do.

In today's Gospel, we find a similar story. Jesus came upon a party bearing a young man who had died, and he had compassion on the man's mother. The Gospel reads, **Luke 7:14b-16, "(Jesus) said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.'**¹⁵ **And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.**¹⁶ **Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and 'God has visited his people!'"**

Jesus' work was like that of Elijah, but on steroids! Jesus and Elijah were both filled with God's Word, but Jesus showed no doubt, but only courage. In Jesus, there was no sense of panic or exasperation, but only confidence. And our Lord prayed, "**I say to you, arise.**" And the young man was lifted up.

The people proclaimed, **“a great prophet has arisen among us!”** and **“God has visited His people!”** The people knew their Bibles, for they immediately knew that the miracle verified and validated the Word which Jesus had proclaimed to them, a Word of hope, a Word of love, a Word of reconciliation.

We don't know much about Jesus' life before his baptism by John the Baptist. Apparently, that period is not important otherwise God would have told us more about it. But what is important are the Words of Jesus which have been preserved for our reflection.

Jesus said, **“I am the bread of life,”** and we receive his word that he might satisfy our deepest hungers in this life.

Jesus said, **“I am the light of the world,”** and we receive his Word that we might follow him through the valley of the shadow of death unto eternity life.

Jesus said, **“I am the good shepherd,”** and we receive his Word because we know we are sheep who've lost their way and that he, our shepherd, will provide direction, protection, and nourishment for our souls.

As it was for Elijah, so too it is for us: Whenever we study and pray God's Word it validates itself in our own lives, in our hearts and minds and bodies. God visits us through his Word.

So we cling to these words of Jesus, and we find peace in a world of heartache and bloodshed. We cannot anticipate our future, how successful we'll be or how long we're going to live. But I can tell you with absolute confidence that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, for that's what the Word says.

God's Word lifted up the son of the woman to whom Elijah ministered, and that same Word lifted up the young man to whom Jesus ministered. So too that Word lifts up you and me today, tomorrow, and for every day to come between now and forever.

This week let us meditate on this Word as a word intended as God's personal Word of love, hope, and renewal.

This week let us find healing, hope, and joy in this Word.

And this week let us take opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.