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Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA 22310
Sunday, June 6, 2010

Luke 7:11–17
I Kings 17:8–16

A LITURGY OF ABUNDANCE

If you go home and *Google* the words *Brueggemann* and *abundance*, you will be amazed at what pops up on your screen. Walter Brueggemann is an Old Testament professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary. He has made famous the words, *The Liturgy of Abundance*. His premise centers on God's abundance throughout scripture and man's emphasis on scarcity. In fact, Brueggemann says that mankind has created a myth of scarcity.

Brueggemann claims that the Old Testament is filled with story after story overcoming this myth. And all we have to do is look at the very beginning of scripture in the first chapter of Genesis to see evidence of what Brueggemann proclaimed. Everything that God created was available in abundance, and it was all good. In fact, it took over four chapters of retelling salvation history before man even prepares for a famine. A pharaoh makes ready for a terrible time of drought.

God works in us, and God brings about abundance. Think about the description of how the powerful have interacted with the family of God. They've often been paranoid, and they've often prepared for the worst, making those rainy day preparations in spite of God's promise to give us each our daily bread.

Enter into this dynamic, stage left, the prophet Elijah. He drops in on us in Chapter 17 of 1st Kings. And he hangs around until the second chapter of 2nd Kings. He suddenly emerges halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. He comes from Tishbe, his home, and he goes to Samaria to see, of all people, King Ahab. King Ahab is noteworthy because he has done more evil in the sight of God than all the Israelite kings put together up to that time. He is considered even more despicable than King Jeroboam, who was famous for erecting idols all over Israel just to keep the people away from Jerusalem and the temple.

Yes, I know, these names make us glaze over with the haze of unfamiliarity. But when we hear their significance, when we recognize that they are sign posts for all of us in our walk with God, names like King Jeroboam remind us not to substitute our ability for faith in God. They remind us that no matter how clever or cunning we may become, how popular we think we might be, if we do not trust in God, our world will always be broken and fraught with one sadness after another. God is still in charge despite all the conniving of Jeroboam and his great, great grandson Ahab.

It says even though Ahab had walked in the footsteps of the sins of Jeroboam, he did even worse. You remember from all those Sunday school lessons, Ahab married Jeze-

bel—the symbol of betrayal, of walking outside the faith: Jezebel. You can just see her dress. You can see how King Ahab walks behind her like a puppy, panting. She represents the worst form of idol worship—the supplanting God, who is the creator, with a fertility god named Baal, literally a god of rain and harvest. Ahab has taken this pagan woman who not only doesn't worship the lord of Israel, but she entices him away to worship Baal with her. And God sends Elijah to Ahab. He sends Elijah to say, "This will end because God is still in charge."

And then after going to the wadi—and we still don't know where the wadi is, by the way—and watching as the springs of water dry up there during the drought, God finally sends Elijah to Zarephath in the region of Sidon, which happens to be where Jezebel's family is most influential—the home of Baal worshipers and the idol itself, the place where Jezebel is headed. Doesn't this sound a little like a Hollywood movie where Arnold Schwarzenegger of *Rambo* gets dropped behind enemy lines and there are no supplies and very little hope? This is where Elijah finds himself. The King of Israel is his arch enemy. The wicked Queen Jezebel hates his guts. He is a fugitive from the law and running from all the law enforcement in that land.

He's sent into enemy territory for his survival; he is at the mercy of the most vulnerable and most destitute of people in ancient society—a widow—and a widow from another faith, to boot. Apparently, the individual to whom God sends Elijah is literally the poorest of the poor. And you heard what happened. Her cupboard had one can of Spam left. That was it. And they were to eat that, even though the can says you can eat it cold; no, it's only bearable if you warm it up. They were to eat that and die.

So here is the liturgy of abundance. Here is the language for those who would worship the living God. God is at work leading us. God's providence will manifest itself in unpredictable and surprising ways. Even a widow fulfills what God wants. And God's abundance providence is never thwarted by our failures or even our fears. God's providence endures no matter how desperate our circumstances. That's why they always go into the desert to find God's redemptions. God's providence always leaves God's people to a surprising destination.

A new way to be the people of God, to recognize the life-changing truth of God's words, a new way to be the church to one another: this is the language of abundance—this is the liturgy of God's people. We cannot deny it and as we allow it to embrace us, we will be fed, and those around us will share in that blessing.

The word of the Lord. Amen.