

**“Faith Trusts that God is Good - All the Time”**

**<sup>17</sup> Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. <sup>18</sup> She said to Elijah, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?”**

**<sup>19</sup> “Give me your son,” Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. <sup>20</sup> Then he cried out to the LORD, “O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?” <sup>21</sup> Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him!”**

**<sup>22</sup> The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. <sup>23</sup> Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive!”**

**<sup>24</sup> Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.”**

Before coming to St. John’s, I served Good Shepherd in Kearney, NE, for 10 years. Good Shepherd does not enjoy the long history that St. John’s does. Good Shepherd started in the late 1970’s as a small group of Lutheran Christians gathered for worship in people’s homes, a conference room of a bank, and a back room of a restaurant for many years before WELS helped them purchase land and build a church facility, a 30x50 multipurpose steel building. Good Shepherd called that home for 24 years until in 2010 God allowed us to build a much nicer facility that actually looked and felt like a church. One of the reasons that small group of Lutheran Christians was able to build that new church was because of the generosity of a group in WELS known as Builders for Christ (BFC). Consisting mainly of retirees, this group travels the country helping with WELS church building projects offering their labor for free. Herb Mehne, the BFC project manager, was known for this catchphrase – “God is Good – All the Time.” In fact, several times a day he would call out to the workers, “God is Good!” The rest of us within earshot were supposed to respond “All the time.” Unfortunately, the group didn’t always respond in a heartfelt believable way – so Herb would make us do it again until our voices made it clear that we do really believe that God is good – all the time.

The people in our sermon lesson for today were experiencing plenty of “God is good” moments, but they were struggling to speak out that last part – “all the time.” The first person

I want to focus your attention on is King Ahab, king of the northern kingdom of Israel from 874-853 B.C. Listen to the Bible's description of Ahab. **"Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria, Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him"** (1 Kings 16:30-33). And so King Ahab didn't think the LORD is good when he sent the prophet Elijah with messages like this, **"As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives,....,there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word"** (1 Kings 17:1b). This drought was actually God being good - lovingly calling King Ahab to repentance over his blatant acts of idolatry (worshipping false Gods). Unfortunately, King Ahab did not respond by saying "all the time" to Elijah's "God is good."

The second person I want to focus your attention on is the prophet Elijah. Mature in the Christian faith; committed to the Lord's work – those are phrases we would use to describe Elijah. When Herb calls out "God is good," Elijah (if he were still living) would be one of the first to respond "all the time" or would he? Scripture makes it clear to us that Elijah did not love dealing with King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. They were a pain in his prophetic behind – actually more than that as they were constantly a threat to Elijah's life. And sure, God was good when he provided a hide out, food and water for Elijah during the drought at the Kerith Ravine, but why would God let the brook dry up? And then God came up with a different plan to provide for Elijah during the drought. He sent him north to the land of Sidon on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea just north of Israel. Good plan God. Make me travel through the kingdom of my sworn enemy King Ahab so that I can go live in the country where King Ahab's father-in-law is the king. Plus, the host family in Sidon God sent Elijah to live with was a poor widow and her son who had no money and almost no food. I suspect that if Herb was alive in the 800's B.C. and would call out "God is good" then Elijah would respond by saying "some of the time, but not right now."

The third person I want to focus your attention on today is the Widow of Zarephath that Elijah got to live with during the drought. When Elijah knocked on the door looking for food and lodging – she wasn't really prepared to oblige. **"I don't have any bread – only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it – and die"** (1 Kings 17:12). If Herb would have come calling "God is good" I'm certain she would have said, "not really." But then you might remember that the little flour and little oil never ran out until it rained again. I'm sure this left an impression upon her, as well as the prophet Elijah sharing more promises of God with her, and this new Christian was ready to say "God is good – all the time."

Until our sermon lesson happened. <sup>17</sup> **Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing.** <sup>18</sup> **She**

said to Elijah, **"What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"** (1 Kings 17:17-18). Can God possibly be good at a time like this? It certainly didn't seem like it to the woman who had already experienced the pain of losing her husband. And you wonder if the thought crossed Elijah's mind – "You're killing me God. You just had her believing in you and then you allow another difficulty to enter her life?" Listen to what happens next. <sup>19</sup> **"Give me your son,"** Elijah replied. **He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed.** <sup>20</sup> **Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?"** <sup>21</sup> **Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!"** <sup>22</sup> **The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.** <sup>23</sup> **Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"** <sup>24</sup> **Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth"** (1 Kings 17:19-24).

Life on earth can be a bit of a roller coaster. Happy times, sad times, confident times, overwhelming times, fun times, and painful times. Times where it is easy to say and think that God is good (two babies baptized today) and times where it is tough to say and think that God is good (three members diagnosed with cancer this week). The demons and our own sinful natures are never going to encourage us to say "God is good – all the time" as we ride the roller coaster. The temptation is strong for us to respond to Herb's "God is good" by saying "well - it depends on what is going on in my life." Today our lesson reminds us that faith trusts that "God is good – ALL the time." And the reason we can think that, say that, and believe that no matter what is going on in our lives is because of the cross and empty tomb of Jesus that stand as monuments of proof that God is good All the time. So when you are tempted to respond to "God is good" statements by saying "only some of the time" – remember your Savior who lived a perfect life on this earth in your place not just some of the time, but all of the time he was here so that he could be the Savior you needed. And when you are tempted to respond to "God is good" statements by saying "what good have you done for me lately God" – remember your Savior Jesus on the cross willingly suffering the eternal punishment of Hell in your place as punishment for All of your sins so that you could be spared that Hell. And when you are tempted to respond to "God is good" statements by saying – "God is good, but not right now" remember the empty tomb of Jesus which reminds us that our two biggest fears, physical death and spending eternity in Hell, have been defeated for all of time for all who believe in Christ Jesus as their Savior. Jesus changes the way we view every aspect of our lives no matter what part of the rollercoaster we are on. Faith trusts that God can bring good even from difficult times as he builds character, develops perseverance, equips people to serve others, gives opportunities to serve our neighbor, keeps people focused on spiritual matters, or simply just brings people to Heaven. Faith trusts that whether God is clearly revealing his goodness or whether he is disguising that goodness behind the mask of difficulty or tragedy – we can always respond when Herb says, "God is good" by saying "All the time."

A few years ago tragedy struck a WELS pastor and his family who live near Watertown, WI. This pastor and his wife were big supporters of Luther Preparatory School, even sending their own kids to this school. A few years ago they had a fun and exciting summer they were looking forward to. One of their kids was getting married and one of their kids was graduating from LPS. A week before graduation at LPS and only months before the wedding, God in his wisdom decided to call home the wife and mother of this family at the age of 48. In the midst of finalizing plans for graduation and wedding celebrations, they also had to plan a funeral to celebrate the eternal life in Heaven of their wife, mother, and friend. Pastor Mark Zarling, president of Martin Luther College (our synod's pastor/teacher training college) opened up his sermon at LPS graduation that year by saying something like this – "If a tragedy like this happened at many other schools – grief counselors would be brought in to help deal with those who are distraught. But since every day at this school you are counseled by God's Word in worship, in the classroom, in your conversations with faculty and other students – that is unnecessary because the cross and empty tomb of Jesus prepares you to deal with anything." Or to put it another way, faith trusts that "God is good, All the time." Amen.