

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.” As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” But she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.” She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. She then 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!” But he said to her, “Give me your son.” He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the Lord, “O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?” Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, “O Lord my God, let this child’s life come into him again.” The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, “See, your son is alive.” So 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.” 1 Kings 17:8-24

As I am sure some of you know, growing up, my mom was a clown. (yes, that’s right this optimistic disposition is actually a genetic trait passed down through the generations). Well the grand finale to her routine, was when she pulled a rabbit out at the end of each show. And therefore rabbits were always a part of my childhood. As such, I think my family learned everything there was to know about rabbits. What they ate, what to make their beds out of, the importance of

neutering/spaying to avoid more rabbits... yes, our family became quite the rabbit connoisseurs. But perhaps no lesson was more important than the introduction of new rabbits to the rest of the rabbit family because of how easily they can become either the best - or worst - of friends. You see rabbits, are extremely territorial and thus it is imperative that you introduce them *slowly*.

And so, knowing this important rabbit rearing fact, the weekend my mom brought home our new bunny, Pepsi, we knew that we had to cautiously introduce Pepsi with the rest of his new bunny family. At the time, we only had one hutch, but 2 other rabbits, so my dad crafted a divider wall out of an old piece of plywood to be placed in the hutch until the bunnies became acclimated to one another. We put Pepsi on the one side and Frisky and Floppy on the other side. Well the next morning, we came down to check on the gang and were shocked to find Pepsi cuddled up in the corner *with* the other two rabbits. That's right, somehow Pepsi had managed to squeeze through the tiny 1 inch space between the board and floor of the hutch to get to the other side. Now, we probably should have taken this to be a good sign that these bunnies would be just fine friends – but still we thought that hadn't been quite enough time to really trust it so we put the bunny back on his proper side and my dad, pulled out another piece of plywood and sealed the hole. Well, the next morning we come down, and who did we find cuddled up in the side but Pepsi again with the other two rabbits! Apparently, this time, he squeezed

through the EVEN SMALLER space at the roof of the hutch. Now picture this with me, in order for this to happen, Pepsi would have had to jump, squeeze, and hop down the other side. So, again, determined to do this was the right way and give these bunnies more time, my dad took another piece of plywood and this time sealed the space making a quilted patched looking divider wall but now thoroughly sealed RCU (Rabbit containment Unit). Houdini himself could not escape this wall. Well the next morning we come down, and I kid you not, there again was Pepsi on the other side with his two new bunny friends sleeping soundly... leaving behind a gaping hole directly in the center of the plywood where he chewed his way through. This stubborn social bunny went all Shawshank on us and burrowed his way through. At that point – we determined these bunnies would be just fine and admitted defeat and removed the wall. Besides who were we to separate true bunny love?

Sometimes, I wish *we* were as determined to tear down the walls that separate us from each other as this little bunny. Because who are we kidding, Our human species seems to be much more interested in staying on our side. We are much inclined in building walls than we are breaking through them....

Our Bible passage this morning is really a story about *walls* between two unusual characters– Elijah and the widow. First of all, Elijah was sent to Sidon which would have been considered enemy territory because it is home of Jezebel and the

land of Baal. This would have been clear lines in the sand that one that someone of his position should not cross. Then, to make matters worse, he was asked to look for a widow, a widow who would have been one of “the least of these” in a male driven society. So when Elijah followed this call from God, he was defying barriers that clearly separated *people like her* from *people like him*. But – perhaps his walls were not even as high as what would have been for the widow. Because when Elijah finds her she is busy in the middle of caring for her child. In her initial reaction to Elijah we can sense her reluctance... almost a “well uh, now is not exactly the best time, sir....I need to get home and cook for my son... but sure I guess I can help...” This reluctance of the widow was not out of rudeness but rather walls she created in order to survive. *To survive a society that been against her and her child*. So when this stranger comes up to her – and interferes with her only goal – to keep your head down, feed your child, and survive – we can only imagine how it must have felt to be interrupted. And yet, she too lets this wall of hers crumble for the sake of this stranger.

But when they let their walls fall, they experience a series of miracles with the multiplying of food and the healing of her son.

This story of these strangers crossing boundaries is more than a story about two kind people who help each other – it’s a story that demonstrates that God was

made present to them BECAUSE of their ability to look beyond those glaring boundaries in order to follow God's call.

From the prophets in the Hebrew Bible to the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, the gospel demands us to look beyond our human forms of separation. It was Jesus who turned social systems upside down by reaching out to the lepers, talking with women, teaching children, it was Jesus who came to remind us that we are to love God, and love one another – anything else, *anything else*, is a barrier that separates us from the gospel, a barrier that separates us from God.

With this story, our fall sermon series of *Pass It On* has moved beyond the warm welcome of strangers to a // **challenge** // of considering how far we are really willing to go for the sake of God's community? How easily are we willing to give up when we sense some discomfort, or when we feel there is just too much between us? Because the truth is, we live in a world of walls around us – and for the most part we like it that way. We climb on the bus with ear phones in our ear avoiding sitting next to another person so that we don't have to engage in conversation, we create labels that define groups to clarify who belongs where with whom, we become so consumed with our soccer and dance, with work and getting dinner ready, that even our busy schedules becomes a wall that feels anything else feels like an interruption. Our Chancel Drama this morning reminds us that even

here at church we create walls of sorts... we sit in the pew behind or down from... but *not directly next to* each other. We use our own comfort, context, and labels as excuses to stay on our own side.

But this text reminds us that these boundaries are in direct contradiction to what we read in scripture. Because from the old testament to the Living Word in Jesus Christ – *we find that it is actually when we tear down these walls of separation that we discover the presence of God.*

I wonder....Can you, think of a relationship, a time when you found the presence of God from a interaction with a stranger? A time when you had to break down walls or barriers in order to connect with another? Perhaps it was a time at school, or work, with in-laws or family, or even hear at church?. A moment when you found that peaceful healing that comes from an exchange of genuine sharing and giving with another.

My friends, it is my prayer, that there is a moment this year, here at church, when you experience that moment with another member of our congregation. That you meet this challenge of reaching out to engage another. Perhaps at a congregational lunch, or after worship, or even down the hall at coffee hour, that you experience a crumbling of walls through the engagement with a stranger. Because if we learn to do that here, in this place, if we learn to be stubborn and

persistent and even create in moving into a thoughtful and sincere engagement and breaking through of walls.... than I believe we will learn to... *Pass it on.* Amen.