

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

<sup>2</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: <sup>3</sup> “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. <sup>4</sup> You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.”

<sup>5</sup> So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. <sup>6</sup> The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

<sup>7</sup> Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. <sup>8</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him: <sup>9</sup> “Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.” <sup>10</sup> So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” <sup>11</sup> As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

<sup>12</sup> “As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “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.”

<sup>13</sup> Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup> For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.’ ”

<sup>15</sup> She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. <sup>16</sup> For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah. (NIV84)

Theme: Support the gospel ministry.

1. In our own background.
2. Throughout the world.

This time of year is when we celebrate our independence as a nation. It is very patriotic time. During the fourth of July we often remember and thank those who have won and maintain freedom for us. It’s very common for someone to encourage others “to support our troops” during the first week of July, for without our military personnel we wouldn’t enjoy the freedoms that we do today.

If we support our military because they have won and maintain freedom for us; how much more should we support the ministry of Christ for he has won our eternal freedom from sin and death? But sadly we often fail to support the gospel of Christ. So today we gather encouragement to support the gospel ministry, in our own backyard and throughout the world.

Ahab was king over Israel, the Northern Kingdom. He was the most wicked king the country had ever seen. The writer of 1 Kings has this to say about him, **Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him...and did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.** He set up altars to idols. He built temples to fertility gods. But not only did Ahab worship these false gods, he also led the people to follow in his detestable practices. In fact at this time the majority of Jews were unbelievers.

God needed someone on his side who was going to fight for the truth. So he chose a man named, Elijah, to be his prophet. He would lead God’s people away from sin. He would be the leader of the few believers left in Israel.

The wickedness going on during Elijah’s day is still going on today. There are still wicked leaders. Not only do they bow down and worship false gods, they encourage others to do the same. Some, who even claim to be Christians, obviously don’t care about God or his Word. The majority of people in the world don’t consider themselves Christians. And many that do aren’t really Christians for they don’t believe in Jesus as God and the Savior of the entire world. Believers in this world are largely outnumbered. And like he did during Elijah’s time, God wants people to lead his children. So God chooses pastors and teachers. This happens every year in our synod. This past spring 37 men graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

and received calls into the gospel ministry. A few days earlier 139 men and women graduated from Martin Luther College. Out of that number 87 people were chosen by God to teach his children at our schools. Just like at Elijah's time, God still chooses some to attack sin and lies but teach the truth clearly.

He chooses them to dedicate their lives to spreading the gospel. Their lives are focused on the message of Christ in a sin-filled world. First they show how we are sinners from birth and unable to do anything to please God. So Christ came down to this world to live a perfect life that we could not. And then on the cross he gave us his perfect life. And he put the guilt of the world's sins on his shoulders. And three days later he rose from the dead. He promises to come again and take all believers to live with him forever. This message of the gospel is the message of God's love. And without it, no one can be saved. This same message of God's love is what Elijah spread. But he couldn't do it by himself. He needed help and support. For awhile God chose ravens to support him. He's not going to do that today. No, that is what he has you for. Lay members—his children whom he loves, he has given them the privilege of helping out with his gospel ministry. Lay members and their called workers and partners together. They join together with one main goal—sharing the gospel.

We work together to spread the gospel of Christ. But at times we may fail to do our part in supporting the work of the gospel. And there are various reasons for that. We like to make excuses. "I have a job." you say, "I just don't have the time." But the truth is, it's rare that we don't have the time—it's more likely that we don't want to make the time because other things are more important than sharing in the gospel ministry in our minds. "And by the way, why do I need to help in the ministry when I pay someone to do it for me?" You know someone who needs to hear the gospel, but you don't want to put yourself out there. Plus, you figure that someone will share the gospel with him eventually.

We also like to complain. When we don't get what we want, then we make sure that others know a mistake has happened. Or we don't like what's going on so we stay away from God's house. Or we don't volunteer. At times it may seem as if we are working against the gospel ministry instead of supporting it. You figure if you don't like

what's going on, perhaps your money is best spent on yourself, so you withhold offerings to God. You only go to worship occasionally, so why would you encourage others to worship with you? And so we fail to support the gospel ministry.

But there are many ways to help in the ministry of the gospel. You can start by spreading the gospel yourselves. You know many unbelievers who are aware that you are a Christian. Witness to them through your words and actions. When you have the opportunity share the gospel with them, tell them the message of Christ. Comfort them with the free forgiveness won by Christ. Don't assume that the pastor or someone else will do it for you. You know more people than the pastor does—you know them better too. Share the gospel yourself, tell them about Christ, invite them to worship. You can volunteer to teach Sunday, help at VBS or BASIC. Help out canvassing or sending out postcards. Encourage others to come to Bible Class, or to study for the public ministry.

We can also support the gospel ministry through our prayers. We pray continually for the spread of the gospel in Standish, Sterling, and beyond. We pray that people may be brought to faith and strengthened in that one true faith. And we give generously in our offerings. For they go to the work of the gospel. To help teach our children. It goes to increase the faith and knowledge of our members in Bible Class. To invite people in the area to worship services. Your offerings help spread the gospel in our own backyard.

But we don't just support the gospel ministry in our own backyard, we also support it throughout the world.

For awhile God supported Elijah through ravens. He could have kept on doing this indefinitely, but he didn't. He wanted to give others the opportunity to support the gospel ministry. So he sent Elijah northwest, to the town of Zarephath. It was by the Mediterranean Sea. God sent Elijah to a foreign country, to talk to a Gentile. For a time, Elijah was a missionary.

God still does the same today. God not only chooses his pastors and teachers, he also chooses his missionaries. Even in our small synod, God chooses missionaries to go throughout the world to spread the gospel in foreign countries. This spring 18 graduates of MLC chose to

go over seas to spread the gospel. Many years graduates from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary are sent as missionaries to foreign countries. Guys I went to school with are currently serving or have served in Russia, Southeast Asia, and Africa. God has sent those men to three different countries on three different areas of the world. God still sends missionaries today—even through us.

So Elijah was sent to a Gentile widow. She had no money and couldn't work. She was gathering sticks to make a fire so that he she and her son could eat one last loaf of bread. That would be their last meal. And then they would starve to death. But Elijah said to her, **Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.** This foreign woman believed God's promise through Elijah. So she went and did what Elijah told her to do. And it happened just as Elijah said. The oil and flour never ran out. She always had plenty to eat and to drink.

The woman took Elijah into her home. She made a room for Elijah on the roof. In this way she supported the gospel ministry. God gave her an opportunity to help a man of God, and she took it. She did what she could to make sure other people heard about the Lord and his love. Although she didn't have much she still supported the gospel ministry. We are able to send missionaries throughout the world because of your offerings. Your offerings not only go to spread the gospel here, but throughout the world. This year, as a congregation, we'll send at least 7300 dollars to the synod. And part of that money will go to our synod's schools. They will go to teach our future pastors, teachers, and missionaries. Another portion of your offerings goes to send missionaries throughout the world. Without your offerings foreigners would never hear about Christ. And still more is used to start new congregations in the U.S. Through your offerings you can participate it and support the gospel ministry even if you aren't present physically.

You may remember that four weeks ago we talked about what happened with this widow's son. He died. But Elijah raised him from the dead by the power of the Lord. The first person ever to ever be

raised from the dead was not a Jew, but the son of a Gentile widow. The gospel was spread in a foreign country. And as a result people were saved. This still happens today. For where the gospel is spread people hear about Christ. They hear of Christ on the cross taking our sins upon himself and suffering our punishment. They are convinced by the Holy Spirit that he they can't do anything to save themselves and that Christ has done it all for them already. Throughout the world people are hearing this message. And they are saved. Albeit in a different way than the son of the widow of Zarephath. Christians still die because of sin. But they are saved from eternal death. For through faith we receive the blessings Christ won for us. And all believers will live with him in heaven forever. But they can't believe if they don't hear the Word. And they can't hear the Word unless someone preaches to them. And no one can preach unless they are sent. And without offerings we can't send anyone. So we graciously and willingly give our offerings to God. So that we may send missionaries throughout the world to reap the harvest. So that we may live with people from all nations and languages in heaven forever.

This week many people supported our troops, and for good reason—they have won and maintain our freedom. How much more than do we support the spread of the gospel. For it is the message of the love of Christ and his work for us. So we give our offerings, we offer up our prayers, we join in the ministry when we can in our own backyard and throughout the world. Yes we do all we can to support the gospel ministry so that people everywhere may hear the gospel, believe it, and join us in heaven forever. Amen.