



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 10 STORIES OF ELIJAH

This story is quite long and may be divided into several lessons. The story has four parts: Elijah with the widow, the prophets of Baal, the encounter with God and Elijah's ascent to heaven.

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

Today's story is a series of stories from the life of Elijah, one of Israel's greatest prophets. He lived during the time that Israel was falling apart and abandoning God.

Four stories are included:

- Elijah performs a miracle for a widow who offers hospitality to him during a drought.
- Elijah and the prophets of Baal have a contest to see which God will answer their request to end the drought.
- Elijah encounters God.
- Elijah is taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot.

WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

1 Kings 16–17

2 Kings 1–2

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church on the following Sundays:

Year B: Last Sunday of Epiphany,
Proper 12 (Sunday closest
to

July 27) and Proper 27
(Sunday closest to
November 9)



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

Israel and Judah were surrounded by pagan peoples who worshiped other gods. The Israelites found some of these gods very attractive and also chose to worship them. Some people apparently followed the “mob rule” and just went along with the majority in turning to other gods.

Elijah, a prophet in the northern kingdom of the divided monarchy (in the years 873–843 B.C.) was a very holy man, who was called to bring the faithless people back to God. Sometimes he was all alone in his faithfulness to God, but he never gave up. The many miracles that he accomplished were proof of his goodness and his favor with God.

The Elijah stories record the battle in the northern kingdom for the survival of the rule of God against the many other gods in the region. Elijah was what we call an ethical prophet, one of the first in the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament). Later he will be followed by the famous ethical prophets of the eighth century—Amos, Hosea and Micah. Elijah ushers in a full and rich era of ethical prophecy in Israel’s history. It is the prophets of this era who help the people stay faithful to God in what will be devastating times in their history.

Elijah’s time is a very sad time in Israel’s history, a time when her people continue, over and over again, to turn away from God. It is hard for us to read about because it reminds us of our own times of faithlessness, when we choose popularity or material things or hatred and resentments instead of following the commandments to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself.” It is so easy to go in the wrong direction—this is our own Fall, continued. As long as we do not obey God it seems hopeless to expect that we can remain God’s chosen people.

Later, though we cannot seem to help ourselves, we will find that God both forgives us for our faithlessness and gives us the way to remain God’s chosen people by sending us God’s only Son to reconcile us with God.

We can see in these stories the theme of this year’s lessons: God stays with us, no matter what.



THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

In the New Testament, Jesus is often compared with—or confused with—Elijah. Apart from Moses, Elijah was considered by the Jews to be the greatest of Israel’s prophets. He did indeed challenge the dominant faithless structure of the society.

As a part of the great line of prophets, then, we in the Episcopal Church also honor Elijah, who called God’s people to be faithful to God.



GATHERING

Check-In

Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to “check in” with members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



PRAYER

Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- large pillar candle or large Christ candle
- matches
- cross

After all the group members have had a few minutes of fellowship time, gather together for a simple opening prayer. Ask one member to light the candle while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting this verse from Psalm 119 in the meeting room).

Invite the member who lit the candle to read this prayer:

- Dear Lord, we thank you for bringing us together to hear your word and learn about your prophet Elijah. Help us to love you and to listen for that still, small voice of calm as Elijah did. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord.
Amen.

Carefully extinguish the candle.



TELLING THE STORY

Set the Scene:

- Turn off the lights in the room, and keep the door(s) closed as much as possible. Once youth are seated, ask them to be totally silent for just a few minutes. Tell them to close their eyes, if they wish, and just take in the total silence. After about 3 minutes, ask them how it felt to be so quiet.

Read the stories about Elijah from a Bible or tell the stories in your own words. The section on Elijah in 1 Kings 17–19 is divided into short stories that demonstrate God’s control of the earth and God’s protection of the prophet Elijah.

Here is the breakdown of the stories:

1 Kings 17:1-24: Elijah announces a drought and is protected by God from its effects. During this drought, a widow provides him with water to drink and, in exchange for her kindness, he miraculously provides food for her and then brings her ill son back to life.

1 Kings 18:1-40: Elijah challenges King Ahab (who encourages the worship of the god Baal and other gods) and his prophets to a contest to see which deity could end the drought. Elijah sets up an altar for God; the 450 prophets set up another. Notice the imbalance! God sets Elijah’s altar on fire, even after Elijah has drenched it with water, to prove that the contest is not fixed. Elijah is quite a character in this story. In 1 Kings 18:27 Elijah makes fun of the prophets, asking whether their god has wandered away, gone to the bathroom or fallen asleep!

1 Kings 19: Elijah is discouraged (1 Kings 18) because people are always trying to kill him. In this condition, Elijah encounters God in the “small still voice” or “the sound of sheer silence” and is commissioned to anoint new kings in Syria and Israel. (The God of Israel has the authority to reject and appoint kings.) God also tells Elijah to find



WEAVING OUR FAITH

Lesson Box

Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's scribe
- pen or pencil
- file box in which to store the cards

Ask a volunteer or assign a student to act as class *scribe*. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As prompts, you might ask:

- What did we learn from this story?
- What did we learn about God?
- What did we learn about ourselves?

Once the class has agreed on its wording, ask the *scribe* to write the lesson on the card, date it and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered—in the participants' own words.



WEAVING GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

Elijah gave to his people an alternate picture of reality than the reality that King Ahab gave to them. He

gave them God's picture of how people should live in God's world, and sometimes he was persecuted for being God's agent rather than the king's or the king's idol Baal.

God's Beloved Community is also an alternate reality, a reality that is different from the reality that we see in front of us. God's Community has elements that we lack, such as equitable laws and equitable sharing of resources, and it rejects elements of our worldly reality that we have, such as the social sin of racism and our tendency to misuse our environment.

It can be important for us, in striving to create God's Beloved Community, to look at the world we see

around us and be able to identify where and how it differs from God's world.

- What is something that we need in order to bring about the reality of God's Community on Earth?
- What is something that keeps us from having God's Community as our reality?



CLOSING PRAYER

Before the group leaves, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service

or back to their homes in the knowledge of God's love and protection. The following prayer is well-suited for this lesson:

- In the depth of silence
no words are needed,
no language required.
In the depth of silence
I am called to listen.

Listen to the beating of your heart,
listen to the blowing of the wind,
the movement of the Spirit.
Be silent, said the Lord,
and know that I am God. *Amen.*

— Indonesian prayer; public domain
(Chapel Service & Prayers 2005,
St Paul's School, Concord, New Hampshire)

End the class with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

The youth respond:

- Thanks be to God!



Weaving God's Promises

WHAT'S RIGHT VS. WHAT'S POPULAR

A well-known axiom states, “What’s popular is not always right; what’s right is not always popular.” It has been attributed to Mark Twain and even to Howard Cosell! In this activity, participants think about this saying and apply it to their own lives.

Materials:

copies of the What’s Right vs. What’s Popular worksheet (p. 7), 1 per group member
pens and pencils

Directions:

1. After finishing the story, ask the group what the people did that was not right but certainly popular with many others. How did that affect them?
2. Distribute the worksheet. Give the group about 10-15 minutes to complete it.
3. Regather and invite volunteers to share some of their answers.

WHAT'S RIGHT VS. WHAT'S POPULAR

Complete the following:

One thing that is popular in our culture that I don't think is right is _____

My faith/church/prayer really helped me when _____

Check off ALL that apply to you:

Pressure	Faith
<input type="checkbox"/> I usually give in to pressure from others.	<input type="checkbox"/> My faith is strong.
<input type="checkbox"/> I try to fight pressure from others.	<input type="checkbox"/> I feel God's presence in my life.
<input type="checkbox"/> Fitting in is important to me.	<input type="checkbox"/> I pray regularly.
<input type="checkbox"/> I prefer being my own person.	<input type="checkbox"/> I pray when I need/want something.
<input type="checkbox"/> I feel comfortable in my own skin.	<input type="checkbox"/> I'm okay talking about my faith in God.
<input type="checkbox"/> It's easier to conform than it is to be different.	<input type="checkbox"/> I hear God answering my prayers.

One thing that is right in our culture that is NOT popular is _____



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THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

Group members look at a 19th century hymn and an iconic 20th century anthem and discover how the two pieces relate to the story of Elijah as well as to their own lives.

Materials:

copies of *The Hymnal 1982*, 1 per participant

copies of the lyrics of “The Sounds of Silence” (search for these online and print copies for each participant)

optional: cell phone and bluetooth speaker

Preparation:

Gather enough hymnals for the group.

Copy the lyrics for *The Sound of Silence*.

If possible, ask the church's organist/pianist to play hymn #652 (*Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*) for the group, which may mean taking the group into the worship space, or go to <http://www.stjamesoakland.com/midi/hymns.html> to play the music for the hymn.

Directions:

Part 1:

Tell the group to follow along with lyrics as hymn #652 is being played. Pay particular attention to verses 1, 2 and 5.

Discuss:

- How does this hymn relate to the story we read today?
- How were the people being foolish?
- What is being asked for?
- What are some words or phrases that caught your attention? that you like?

Part 2:

1. Distribute copies of *The Sounds of Silence* lyrics.
2. Play the song.
 - Why did I choose to play this particular song?
3. *The Sounds of Silence* is obviously set in modern times. What does it have to do with the stories of Elijah?
 - What does it say to you?

Close:

- Collect hymnals.
- The discussion generated by this activity would make for a great article in the church's newsletter or website. If you've not already done so, ask for a volunteer (or two) to write such an article.



Weaving God's Promises

HEY GOD...IT'S ME, AND I NEED ANSWERS

Group members write questions they've always wanted but were afraid to ask God and put them in a jar. Then, one by one, the youth will do their best to answer some of the questions. The results of this activity can be the basis for a Q & A or advice column in the church newsletter or on its website.

Materials:

- good-sized jar with cover
- slips of paper or index cards
- pens and pencils

Directions:

1. Give each member of the group a few slips of paper or index cards.
2. Tell them to think about questions—tough or otherwise—that they'd like to ask God...the more, the better.
3. The questions can be about their own lives, the world, nature, relationships, their families or friends... anything they'd like.
4. Members should write one question per card and put all cards in the jar. Ask them not to put their names on the cards.
5. Allow 10-15 minutes for this part of the activity, then mix the cards well in the jar.
6. Pass the jar around and invite each group member to take one of the cards. If people draw one of their own cards, that card goes back in the jar and another is drawn.
7. Give members time to read their cards and think about their answers.
8. Go around the circle and ask each person to read his or her question and give a thoughtful, prayerful answer.
9. Allow time, as each card is presented, for other group members to add their own responses to the mix.

Close:

- Collect the cards and return them to the jar. At any point in the year, additional questions for God may be added and discussed.



Weaving God's Promises

ACROSTIC POEMS

Group members write descriptive acrostic poems about a character or event from the stories of Elijah.

Materials:

writing paper
pens and pencils
markers or colored pencils

Directions:

1. Tell the group members to select one or more characters, places or events from the stories of Elijah about which they could write a poem. Possibilities include: *Elijah, prophet, miracle, drought, silence, chariot, etc.*
2. Instruct each member to write the word that he or she has chosen in capital letters vertically down the left side of a sheet of paper.
3. Explain that each letter in their word will be the start of a word or a phrase that describes the person, place or event that they selected from the stories of Elijah. Here is a sample acrostic poem, based on the word WIDOW:

Willing to help Elijah
Ill son is brought back to health by Elijah
Did not have to worry about food again
Opened her heart to a stranger
Was the recipient of two miracles

Close:

- Collect the poems and post them in the meeting space or in a spot where the entire congregation can enjoy them.



Weaving God's Promises

THAT STILL, SMALL VOICE OF CALM

Group members learn about and practice guided meditation as a way of inviting peace and calm into their lives.

Materials:

comfortable seats, cushions, pillows, etc.

optional: cell phone and speaker, and playlist of quiet music or nature sounds

meditation script for children chosen from those offered at <http://www.innerhealthstudio.com/relaxation-scripts-for-children.html>

Preparation:

Practice the meditation selected before the session.

If using the CD (or other audio device), set it up in the meeting space.

Directions to participants:

1. Find a spot to sit comfortably, with your feet flat on the floor or with your legs crossed.
2. I will be guiding you through a brief exercise in meditation.
3. Close your eyes and think of a word or short phrase or even a soothing sound to repeat. It could be something like “God is good”; “I am loved”; “Pray for me”; “Ohm” or “Hush.”
4. When you have your word, relax and sit quietly and follow my directions.
5. If, at any time, a thought comes into your mind, let it be there, let it pass through, and move on.
6. Read the meditation script chosen before the lesson.

Close:

- After 15 minutes of meditation, invite group members to open their eyes. Discuss:
 - How do you feel at that moment?
 - What do you think of this meditation experience?
 - Where was God in your meditation?