

**- Saint John's Pulpit (Nov. 20, Thanksgiving Sunday) –
"Elijah's Thanksgiving" 1 Kings 17:1-6**

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." ²The word of the LORD came to him, saying, ³"Go from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. ⁴You shall drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." ⁵So he went and did according to the word of the LORD; he went and lived by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. ⁶The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the wadi.

Thanksgiving Sunday 2022

You all agree that time flies so fast, no, super-fast! Today, you are going to get a copy of the 2022 Advent meditation book gifted by United Methodist Men and see the sanctuary be decorated by Christmas trees and wreaths after service. From the next Sunday, we begin this year's Advent journey. Then, we will wrap up this year soon. In addition to this, this year's Charge Conference will be followed after service. This week, the FM radio channel 97.1 began to broadcast Christmas/ Holiday music. Malls and stores should not miss many more shoppers in this big shopping season.

With that, the service today is good for us to take a deep breath before entering the upcoming holiday season. A couple of meanings are observed in this Sunday – Thanksgiving Sunday and Christ the King Sunday. However, all around the world, denomination, and communities still are full of many issues and troubles. For example, the news of the shooting on the main UVA campus, in Charlottesville made us so sad. War in Ukraine is still ongoing. Do you think that we can see the 'Christmas Truce' (or ceasefire) again in Ukraine after the Christmas truce of World War I (1914)?

Why Are We Thankful?

As Elijah experienced his life challenge in a drought, the world is in trouble now. But what the story today presents is God's feeding Grace for Elijah although Elijah had no idea what, where, and how to eat in a drought. In the midst of agony, Elijah was told that God had planned to nourish him carefully.

² The word of the LORD came to him, saying, ³ "Go from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. ⁴ You shall drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." 1 Kings 17:2-4 NRSV

Human uncertainty vs. Divine certainty! Although we have no idea about direction and time, God always has clear plans for us. Faith makes us remind and remember God's plan for us. When Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac, his faith shows two characteristics – one is his immediate obedience, and the other is his expectation of God's plan. When God commanded Abraham to give his son Isaac as a burnt offering, he had no hesitation, then hit the road immediately.

³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. Genesis 22:3 NRSV

However, Abraham did not give up God's guidance for him and his son Isaac although he knew that his son would be killed.

⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together. Genesis 22:7-8 NRSV

God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son... don't you think this is amazing? Did Abraham know the end of this story from day one? I don't think so. But like his prayer, God provided a lamb for Abraham and Isaac. When we do not see (human uncertainty), it is the moment when we can trust God's guidance (Divine certainty).

In the severe drought, God never gave up His servant, Elijah. God gave him water to drink, and bread and meat to eat. This reminds us of God's feeding the Israelites during their Exodus. The Israelites also experienced God's grace through water, manna, and quails. But here is one interesting point. In this story, God's feeding was done both in the morning and evening! Knowing that the Israelites received the manna only one time when they were in exodus, what God did for Elijah was very special.

Surrounded by many challenges and troubles, God promises His nourishment and guidance for His people. Although we can't stop these challenges and troubles, as long as we are in His Grace, we are nourished by God all the time. Let's take a moment to think of this year. It is the third year of the thanksgiving season during the pandemic. This year we have seen all about the worst things in the world-war, terror, natural disasters, inflation, global economic crisis, shootings, and so on. Very recently, we had to see news of mass layoffs from big tech companies. In our denomination, there were jurisdictional conferences on the first week of November and elected 13 bishops. Recently, I had a chance to chat with my clergy friend who is in Northeastern Jurisdiction. According to a Bishops' report in Northeastern jurisdiction, 1,000 churches will be closed by 2024. This is what we see before the postponed General conference and does not include how's going to be after the General Conference. No sign of a silver lining! But God's signal is always ongoing. We just trust His goodness and guidance.

A Joy of Giving: Ravens

When God fed Elijah, the ravens were used by God to give him food.

4 You shall drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."

Do you know that this verse requires our careful attention? The ravens are 'Orbim' in Hebrew. However, this word also can be 'Arab' which means 'Bedouins' who lived in desert areas at that time. If so, the Arabs (Bedouins) provided some food for Elijah in a drought. Do you think it makes sense? To be honest, I have no idea whether it was the ravens or the Bedouins that helped Elijah. The point is this. To save one's life, God used those who were

not likely to do something good! God uses the hopeless to give His people hope. Thus, we all are in His hope!

In Korea, the ravens are regarded as ominous birds delivering bad news. Not sure how they are doing in Western culture. By contrast, Koreans like the magpie as an auspicious one because they deliver good news to people. So, when Koreans read the story today, they would be surprised to see that ravens can do this great mission! At the same time, they are surprised because God used these ominous birds for His saving work! A couple of years ago, my family and I visited Culpepper downtown. When I googled the best coffee shop in Culpepper downtown, one of the coffee shops was *Raven's Nest Coffee House*. Don't get me wrong! I am not advertising this coffee shop. My point is this. In South Korea, those who plan to open their business do not use that name, never!

Isn't it amazing? If God used 'intentionally' the ravens or Bedouins to give Elijah life, how great our God is! After this story, Elijah also was nourished by one foreign (Syrophoenician) widow in Zarephath near Sidon. God wanted to give the ravens, Bedouins, and the widow a chance to become main actors in His salvific works. No discrimination or alienation at all. This is another takeaway from the story today- letting them find the joy in giving!

After all, the story today presents a secret of your meaningful Thanksgiving. Trust God who nourishes us. Love your neighbors who need your help. When we love God and our neighbors, we make our Thanksgiving more meaningful and spiritual. This is how to transform every day our daily Thanksgiving!