

April 2, 2025 – 1 Kings 17:17-24 & Luke 7:11-17

This morning, we experienced firsthand how powerful and unpredictable the weather can be. A severe thunderstorm rolled through and a tornado struck the town of Pilot Grove, just down the road. It was a frightening moment and we'll be cleaning up the resulting mess for days or weeks, I have no doubt.

In moments like that, we rely on something outside of ourselves. We put our faith and trust in something beyond our comprehension. And by that I mean... meteorologists. And weather radar. And weather reports. And maybe most of all, our weather apps. Once upon a time, when a storm struck, all you could do was pray, like Martin Luther did when he was caught in a lightning storm. But now? Now we have experts and technology at our disposal.

And we put a lot of trust in them. We trust that the meteorologists have the right data. We trust that their predictions will hold true. We trust that we can make the right decisions based on that information. But sometimes, even the best meteorologists get it wrong. Even the most reliable weather app gives you bad information. The storm shifts. The radar miscalculates. And we realize that, for all our technology and knowledge, weather remains unpredictable.

Now imagine basing your entire life—your crops, your economy, your worship—on a god of weather. A god as unpredictable and unreliable as the storm itself. That is exactly what we see happening in our Old Testament lesson this evening. And it is a problem that Elijah is trying to address.

Elijah is a prophet. He is among the greatest prophets the Israelites have ever known. His miracles rival anything from Moses or Peter. He's probably second only to Jesus in the sheer awesome power of God at his disposal. In fact, there are a lot of similarities between Elijah and Jesus... but we'll get to that later.

Elijah is a prophet at a time when God's people desperately need one. They are quickly tumbling down a slippery slope of idolatry and paganism, led by their king—Ahab. A man so depraved that he actually practices human sacrifice using his own children.

Ahab worships a god named Baal. We know from archeological evidence outside the Bible that Baal was known as the Canaanite god of the sky. Which means it's not surprising that, in Scripture, he is also the Canaanite god of weather. And for a nation whose economy and daily survival is built around agriculture, the god of weather is the god of life or death. Of prosperity or poverty. Of luxury or starvation.

For many years, Judah has prospered with good weather and plentiful crops. So Ahab stands before them and says, "This is Baal's doing. You should thank him. You should give him your offerings. Give him your worship, and he'll keep your life good. Baal will give you everything you need." The people believe him. False security is tempting, after all.

Then steps in Elijah. He confronts Ahab and warns him, "The true God – the God of Israel – is not happy. And to show you His anger, and to show the people the weakness of Baal, He is going to send a drought. A severe drought. A drought that will not end until you give up all worship of false gods."

Ahab rejects Elijah. In fact, Ahab tries to have Elijah murdered. And the prophet is forced to flee from Jerusalem. He runs, on foot, without stopping, all the way to the northern border of Israel. And he goes into exile.

There, he meets the widow and son from our Old Testament reading. They take him in—not because they believe in the same God, but because he is able to perform a miracle and provide them food every day when they otherwise would have starved to death. For three years straight, he does this.

But still, they don't believe. No, the widow and her son are actually Canaanites themselves. They believe in Baal. They trust Baal. Despite the drought. Despite Elijah's miracle. Worshiping Baal is a matter of life or death for them.

All the way until death comes to their home. The widow's son becomes sick and dies. And she confronts Elijah about it, blaming him. She believes she has angered Baal by helping the prophet of a different god.

Elijah can't believe that God would let her go on thinking this. So he goes to the boy. Prays over him. Begs God three times to restore the boy's life. And the boy revives. The woman is overjoyed, of course. But she goes to Elijah and says something important: *"Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."*

The word of the Lord in your mouth is truth. That is the key. The miracle Elijah performs is amazing, but it's not the point. The point is that the word of the Lord is true. It is reliable. Worshiping Baal is like trusting a weather app that only gets it right half the time. It might seem accurate at first, but when the storm really comes, it fails you. To worship the Lord is to worship a God whose Word never fails. When He says, "There will be a drought," there is a drought. When He says, "Live," a dead boy lives.

Jesus proves this at the town of Nain. Remember how I said there was a lot in common between Elijah and Jesus? Well, among other things, they are two of the very few people recorded in the Bible to ever raise somebody from the dead. But there's a distinct difference between Elijah's resurrection and Jesus'.

Because when Elijah raises the widow's son, he does so by prayer. Fervent prayer. Repeated prayer. Prayer so intense, he actually covers the boy's body with his own, begging for God's intervention. But when Jesus raises the dead, He does so with a word. With a mere touch. *"Young man, get up."* And he gets up.

There's no prayer here. No begging or pleading or anguished cries for mercy. Jesus is God's Word made flesh. When He says, "Live," you live. End of story. Because the Word of the Lord is true.

A long time ago, at the beginning of creation, the hand of the Lord reached out and took a lump of earth and formed it into a man. And the Lord breathed into that lump of earth and it became a living being. But since the fall of man into sin, we have been cursed to return to the earth from which we came. From dust you were created. To dust you will return.

But in this resurrection at Nain, we see that God still brings life to lifeless dirt. The hand of the Lord reaches out and touches the body of this young man as he decomposes on this bier and the young man becomes a living being once again. That is our hope. That is our promise. That is the truth proclaimed by the Word of the Lord this day.

When thunderstorms come, many of us anxiously refresh our weather apps, looking for updates on the storm. We trust them to tell us the truth about what is coming. And I'm very glad that this morning, they were fairly accurate. It made calming down a room full of preschoolers and kindergarteners a whole lot easier.

But still, storms are unpredictable. Shifting and moving, strengthening and weakening, in ways we can't always predict. They're a lot like life, in that way. We try so desperately to predict the future. To plan for the future. But all those predictions and plans are often just false gods. Promising us rain and then delivering drought. Imagine if your entire life depended on that level of uncertainty. That is what it means to trust in Baal or any false god.

Which is why it's such a blessing to know that Jesus Christ is different. His Word is never wrong. It does not shift. It does not fail. If you want to worship a God who is true and reliable, a mighty fortress in every circumstance, then there is only one God – one thing in this entire universe – who has proven Himself true and reliable time and time again. Reliable in the face of all other gods. Reliable in the face of suffering, disease, and hardship. Reliable in the face of death itself.

You want a God who is trustworthy in matters of life and death? Then worship the God who raises the dead. Worship the God who rose from the dead. Worship the God who lives forevermore. Worship the God whose Word is always true. Amen.