Lesson 17  Elijah: Kings, Widows, and a Still, Small Voice

Lesson 17  Elijah: Kings, Widows, and a Still, Small Voice

Teacher’s Notes:
The Kingdom of Israel has divided. David and Solomon’s kingdom has become the southern kingdom—Judah. Ahab is now king of the northern kingdom of Israel when Elijah comes into the story. Elijah’s life as a prophet is filled with stories. King Ahab is a central figure in Elijah’s day. Much of Elijah’s ministry is in response to Ahab and his wife Jezebel’s leadership. Elijah predicts a drought early in his ministry and then follows God’s lead into the wilderness where ravens bring him food and he drinks from a designated stream until it completely dries up. This story ends with Elijah in need of sustenance and him finding a widow who helps him. The next story in Elijah’s ministry centers on this widow and her son. She is about to make the last of her grain into a bread that she and her son will share as their last meal before starving. Elijah tells her to make him a cake and that her jar of meal nor her oil will be empty. God provides for the widow and her son and Elijah stays with them. Things turn for the worse when the son dies but Elijah revives him through the power of God.

After three years away from the public eye, Elijah returns to confront King Ahab who has been leading his people through the drought that Elijah predicted (warned them of). Elijah gives advice for keeping the animals alive. Elijah confronts Ahab about the number of prophets from other religions that eat at his (and Jezebel’s) table. A contest is set up between Elijah and those prophets and in the end Elijah survives and the rest are dead. At this point, the drought comes to an end. While fleeing from Jezebel in the aftermath of her prophets’ deaths, Elijah takes refuge at Horeb. Elijah waits for God to speak. There is wind, an earthquake, and fire—but God does not speak through any of these. Instead, God speaks in the silence that follows (a still, small voice).

Scripture: 1 Kings 17: 8 – 16
1 Kings 18: 17 – 39
1 Kings 19: 11 – 13

Supplies: • Whiteboard and markers
• Blindfolds (for half the class)
• Multiple translations of the Bible (NRSV should be one of these)

Preparation: • Think about the things you trust to God.
• Have the text marked in a few translations of the Bible.

Activity Instructions       Time
Explaining          Open by telling the class that they are entering a new time in the history of God’s people. After Solomon comes a debate about who should rule, and the kingdom divides. Israel is the Northern Kingdom and its capital will eventually become Samaria. Judah is the Southern Kingdom with its capital in Jerusalem. This makes it more difficult to keep up with the history of God’s people. Rapid transition in the story from one kingdom to another also makes it
hard to keep up with all the characters. With the people divided and kings not looking to God for guidance, the role of “prophet” enters into the story.

**Pondering Prophets**
- Ask the class what the word “prophet” means.  
- Record the responses on the white board or poster.  
- Ask them to list as many prophets as they can.  
  They may include Biblical characters or people from history or their own experience. Many would call Martin Luther King, Jr. a modern prophet. The Islamic community would put Mohamed on the list.  
  Allow the class to list who ever they want.  
- Keep this list and definition for the next couple of months.  
- Allow the class to edit the definition and list each week.

**Ask:**
- What challenges do you think prophets faced?  
- What do you think would be the hardest part of being a prophet?  
- How do you think prophets got through difficult times?  
- What do you think was different about prophets’ relationship with God?

**Trust God**

Explain that Elijah is one of the earliest prophets we really get to know in scripture. Others are mentioned earlier in the text but not much character development is included.

When we first meet Elijah, he is predicting a drought. Then God sends him to widow who will care for him.

**Read** 1 Kings 17: 8 – 16

**Ask:**
- What did God ask of Elijah?  
- What did God ask of the widow?  
- I wonder who had the more difficult task?  
- With what do you trust God?  
- How hard is it to trust God?  
- What would your life look like if you trusted God as did Elijah and the widow?  

What things do you trust to God in prayer?  
Are there things you don’t share or won’t let go of?

**Pray:**
Invite everyone to hold their hands out together, cupped.  
  Explain that we will be imagining prayer concerns in our hands.  
Invite everyone to lift their hands, still together, up towards God.  
  Explain that we will lift our concerns to God in prayer.  
Invite everyone to pull their hands apart and flatten their palms.  
  Explain that we will let go of our concerns, trusting them to God.
Make sure everyone knows the motions and the concept.

**Leader says:**

-- hands cupped --

“In your hands, imagine a person you care about. Think about their need and what they mean to you. Now lift them up to God.”

-- hands lifted up --

“Now take a deep breath and remember that you cannot fix them or make all their troubles go away. All you can do is support them and care for them. Trust this concern to God and trust God will listen.”

-- separate hands --

“When you are ready, release the concern to God.”

**Repeat** with some of the following concerns:

- Needs of others in our community
- Needs of the poor
- Needs of children or the elderly
- Needs of those in other countries

Keep the category vague enough to allow each person to create their own image in their hand.

**End with this one:**

“In your hands, imagine a person that is difficult for you to care about. Think about the ways they have hurt you. Think about the ways others have hurt them. You have a choice. You can hold onto the hurt or lift it up to God.”

-- hands lifted up --

“If you are able, lift that person up to God. Remember that you cannot fix them or un-do the pain they have caused you or others. You cannot heal the pain they have endured. All you can do is seek to understand and forgive.”

-- separate hands --

“When you are ready, release them to God.”

**Trust**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Skip this activity if short on time.**

10 min.

**Trust**

Pair up everyone in the class.

**Others**

Do not pair close friends or family members.

Give each pair a blindfold and have one wear it.

Allow the other partner to guide them on a walk.

Have the pairs line up single file and follow you.

Half way through stop and trade who is blindfolded and who is the guide.

End the walk back in your classroom.
Ask:
• What was the hardest part of this activity?
• What fears did you have?
• How did trusting your partner in this activity compare to trusting God in prayer?

Speak: Explain: 7 min.
For God
Elijah’s next task is to speak for God to King Ahab.
Jezebel is Ahab’s wife and she believes in many gods.
Ahab has not been faithful to God and has supported her beliefs.
In our next reading we see Elijah, bold and brash.

Read 1 Kings 18: 17 – 39
Ask:
• I wonder what part of this story scared Elijah the most?
• How did Elijah continue to show trust in God?
• How good are you at talking about God with others?
• How does your ability to trust yourself in talking about God compare with your trust of God in prayer?
• How does your ability to trust yourself in talking about God compare with your ability to trust others?

Listen: Explain: 13 min.
For God
Ahab and Jezebel were furious and rose up against Elijah.
Elijah goes to Horeb and waits for God to speak.

Read: 1 Kings 19: 11 – 13  (multiple translations will help here!)
(Read 1 Kings 19: 12 – 13 in each translation.)
Ask:
• What are the three things that happened before the voice Elijah heard?
• What was the voice of God? What did it sound like?
• Have you ever experienced God in silence?
• What does a “moment of silence” mean in our culture?
• How do we use silence in worship?
• Where else is silence important?
• How does your ability to be still and silent relate to your being able to trust God, trust others, or speak about God?

Be Still: Explain: 5 min.
With God
Contemplative prayer is a style of prayer that is more focused on listening to God rather than speaking to God. Some people describe it as “spending time with God.” We will take a few minutes of silence and stillness. This may be difficult because we are used to a world that moves very quickly. Try your best to follow the direction and please do not distract others in prayer.
a. Ask the class to get into a comfortable place where they will not fidget or need to move again.

b. Tell them not to close their eyes, but to focus on something boring that will not move or change (the floor or a spot on the wall is great for this).

c. Ask the class to focus on breathing out and nothing else. As they hear sounds other than your voice, invite them to try and “turn down the volume” or tune them out.

d. If they have thoughts, ask them to save them for later. The goal at the beginning is to stop thinking. This will seem like a strange concept but it is possible. Give them at least 30 seconds of pure silence. You can go longer as your group is able.

e. After the silent opening, invite them to imagine a place where God would speak to them. Leave the room in silence for another 20 seconds.

f. After that period of silence, invite them to imagine a place or person to where God might send them. Leave the room in silence for another 20 seconds.

g. After that period of silence, invite them to think about how God might challenge them or the church. Leave the room in silence for another 20 seconds.

h. Invite them to move back to their original seats as ready.

Ask:
• How did you experience the discipline of silence?
• Can anyone share their experience of this prayer?
• How is this prayer different from ways you have prayed?
• What was the easiest part of this prayer?
• What was the most challenging part of this prayer?

Sharing God

Explain that God asks Elijah to take on Elisha (e-LYE-sha) as a disciple (or an apprentice).

Invite the class to think about people they know who could benefit from today’s lesson. Challenge them to share what they have learned with others by speaking about God or bringing others to church.

Prayer

Invite the class to form a circle and join hands. Ask each person to lift up a silent prayer, squeezing the hand of the person next to them when they are done. The last person in the circle will say “Amen” for everyone.