

“The Gift of Desperation”

‘The Book’ by Kim Anderson

You’ve stirred something deeply, you’ve awakened something sweetly, you’ve stirred something deeply, you’ve awakened something sweetly.

On a cold winter’s night I opened The Book

On a cold winter’s night I took another look.

I read of your love and I bowed my head in shame

I read of your Peace and I had to look away,

I read of Compassion, Forgiveness too,

I read that The Light illuminated from you!

You’ve stirred something deeply, you’ve awakened something sweetly, you’ve stirred something deeply, you’ve awakened something sweetly.

On a midwinter’s night I opened The Book,

On a midwinter’s night I took another look.

Help me to see what you have taught,

Help me to see what you have said.

Help me to love others as you have loved me.

Help me to open up to the healing powers of THREE.

‘You’ve stirred something deeply, you’ve awakened something sweetly, you’ve stirred something deeply, you’ve awakened something sweetly.

On a cold winter’s night open that Book.

On a cold winter’s night take another look,

You’ll stir something deeply. You’ll awaken something sweetly,

You’ll stir something deeply, You’ll awaken something sweetly.

On the darkest of dark days, the pagan widow of Zephareth was in the desperate state of hopelessness. She and her son were soon to die of hunger and thirst. But then something happened to turn her near death situation around. The power-filled anti-Baal, God prophet Elijah opened the gate of her dying city and noticed her picking up sticks. Thirsty and hungry he asked for some water and bread. When she replied that she had nothing baked to give him and was in fact, on her way home to bake up their last meal before they died, in the Lord’s name he said: ‘Don’t be afraid’. Really? Don’t be afraid! ‘Fear,’ wrote Rev. Heath, ‘is an easy emotional state. It is one of our basic human default modes. It’s reactive. Somewhere deep inside in most reptilian parts of our brain, we can tap into fear in milli-seconds.

And that’s not a bad thing when you are in a genuinely dangerous situation (from ‘Resurrection Phobia). It’s not so good when fear becomes the only lens through which we view every situation.

Don’t be afraid. Bake me up a cake first, then go fix something for you and your son.’ As God’s prophet, Elijah’s command was of course, meant to kick the woman out of her fixed default mode of fear. Fear had become a danger within the woman, doing its despairing work of creating a hopeless sense that her situation was so bad as to be impossible to deal with. But how could Elijah’s command that sounds so selfish (feed me first) be a saving word from the Lord? And, if sacrifice means to give up something for something else considered more important, what was the woman giving up here? Some say that what she gave up was akin to the first step common to recovery programs. She gave up the belief that she was In control of her situation, and that she was powerless to free herself from her default mode of fear. And too, if sacrifice means to give up something for something else considered more important, what was the more important thing? Elijah said to the woman ‘The jar of meal will not be emptied, and the jug of oil will not fail until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth’. I think that these words stirred up HOPE from deep within her bones: hope in the power of Elijah’s God to save her. ‘Hope’ suggests Rev. Heath, ‘is complex. It is not an emotion as much as a way of viewing the world. It requires us to be creative. It demands better of us. So for the woman who hoped in God, the sweet spirit of generosity awakened and she shared the little she had. Her whole household was fed, the jars miraculously never emptied, and desperate hope smiled at her saving grace

When we open the book of our own lives we find times of feeling out of control (death, ending of relationships, loss of income, empty nest . . .when fear is dictating how we feel and what we do and we sense we need the healing power of THREE) the good news of the gospel is this: We are blessed with hope when we hear Jesus say: ‘I am the bread of life, you who come to me shall not hunger; you who believe in me shall never thirst.

Background for 1 Kings 17:8-17
(from UCC Sermon Seeds by Kate Huey)

An evil king, Ahab, a false god, Baal; and some kind of misunderstanding about just who exactly is in charge of things is the background for our Old Testament story. Ahab rules over Israel, the northern kingdom and the text tells us how 'special' he is, for doing more evil in the sight of God than any of his predecessors. His foreign wife, Jezebel, from Sidon, has brought along her people's god, Baal, and just to make matters worse, she persuades Ahab to set up shrines where this Baal can be worshipped. There is, after all, a commandment about having false gods before the one true God. On to the scene strides the great prophet Elijah, who delivers that message in no uncertain terms: he tells Ahab that there will be no rain for a very long time, unless he, Elijah says so-even though Ahab and Jezebel are worshipping the so-called god of rain, storm, and fertility. Elijah is declaring the power of the One True God,, not Baal, to bring the rains and end the drought, a message that does not go over well with Ahab. So God gets Elijah out of town for awhile, looking after him along the way by sending ravens to bring him food, and leading him to a wadi that provides water for him to drink in the midst of the drought and the food shortage that must follow. The time comes when even these provisions are not enough, and when the drought worsens, God sends Elijah to-of all places-Sidon, the very place Jezebel came from. Our passage begins here with God giving Elijah what must seem like an incomprehensible command, to seek help from a 'nobody' who has nothing' and who probably worships Baal.

Prayer.

God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the Courage to change the things I can and the Wisdom to know
the difference. Amen.

1 Kings 17:8-16

Then the Word of the Lord came to Elijah saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there, for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks: he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug: I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said, but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: "The far of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.



On days when the sky is gray,
the sun has not disappeared forever.