Iona School for Ministry

Old Testament

November 5, 2022

Exercise in interpretation

The goal of this exercise is to interpret a specific lectionary pericope, in accord with the interpretive method presented in the September and October classes. The only information needed comes from the class presentations and discussions, from the handout “Two Views of Israel’s National Past,” and from the NRSV translators’ notes and the New Oxford Annotated Bible notes.

1 Kings 17:8-24

Read the text aloud

*World in front of the text*

* For what liturgical occasion is this text intended? (See [www.lectionarypage.net](http://www.lectionarypage.net) and click on “Reverse Lectionary.”) What other texts are to be read along with it?

Does the overall liturgical context predispose us to hear this passage in a particular way?

* What preconceptions do you and your congregation have about the kinds of miracle stories found in this pericope? Will these need to be addressed in some way in the course of your interpretation, particularly as you return to the world in front of the text?

*World of the text*

* What marks the story of Elijah and the widow from Zarephath off from the surrounding material as a distinct section of the narrative?
* How are the two incidents in this story related to each other? Who is the hero here?
* How does this episode involving Elijah and the widow of Zarephath figure in the larger narrative about Elijah?
* How do the stories about Elijah figure in the periodization scheme of DtH?

*World behind the text*

* This story is an example of legends that were told about prophets, extoling their miraculous deeds—several were also told about Elisha (e.g., 2 Kgs 2:23-24; 6:1-7). What would have been the function of such tales as popular traditions?
* What information do the NOAB notes provide about the geographical and cultural background of the setting for this story?
* What does the figure of the Sidonian widow represent for the writer of DtH, in view of his critique of Israel’s national past? Why would the writer have wanted to incorporate this popular legend into the narrative at this particular point? How is the development of the widow’s character ironic?

*Back to the world in front of the text: midrash*

* In Part II of *Womanist Midrash* Gafney chooses to focus on “royal women,” and thus does not include the widow of Zarephath in her discussion of women in narratives describing the monarchial period. Given Gafney’s general approach in Part I to the various roles of women in non-royal domestic situations, what might she say about this widow?
* Synthesizing what you have learned from each of the preceding steps, formulate a paragraph in which you summarize the main points of the message of this text and then boil this down to a title for a sermon based on this text.