

A lot can change in three years

By [Steve Pankey](#)

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During the time of Elijah's ministry, while the LORD was particularly angry with Ahab and his Ba'al-worshipping wife Jezebel, God shut off the rain in the fertile crescent for three years. It was a drought of epic proportions. It was a mess in those days, and people were hungry everywhere. Which is why Elijah's seemingly simple request—"Bring me a morsel of bread"—brings forth such a dramatic reaction from the widow: "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, however, has been shown the bigger picture.

Three years ago this week, oil from the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig first rolled ashore on the beaches of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach. I preached on the Widow of Zerephath story the following Sunday (you can read it [here](#)), during a time of much anxiety, when it was impossible to see the bigger picture. Now, as the lectionary cycle comes back around to Proper 5, Year C, I find myself looking back over the last three years and realizing that what was once a colossal mess has turned out to be a great benefit for my neck of the woods as for the second year in a row tourism numbers are record breaking, building has increased, and life in south Alabama is pretty darn good. After 18 months of buckling down, caring for one another, and sharing the resources that were available in the midst of a crisis, South Alabama is stronger today than it was in early June 2010.

Just like the story of Elijah and Ahab, however, we haven't yet touched the root problems that caused the mess in the first place. We still hunger after cheap oil, and oil companies are still cutting corners to sell cheap and rake big profits, but the word I felt compelled to speak then remains true today: "God is here." But boy, what a difference three years makes.

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