

1 Kings 17:8-16
From Scarcity to Abundance
WRCoB 11.3.24

You've likely heard the term a "widow's mite".

It refers to a small contribution
Representing all that one can afford to give.

The term originates from a story Jesus told
Comparing a widow's offering
To the temple treasury
With that of a wealthy man.

The widow's mite reveals a powerful truth
About the church and our responsibility to the world.

We are to emulate
The extraordinary generosity of the poor widow
In our approach to the world's needs.

In today's text, we encounter another widow
Who exhibits that same generosity

Let's us explore this wonderful story
And see how it might challenge us today.

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The year was roughly 850 BC
A time of great hardship.

A drought had developed throughout
The whole Mediterranean region.

Elijah, a spokesperson for God
Comes into the pages of the Bible
During the reign of Ahab
In the northern kingdom of Israel

He is first mentioned here in 1 Kings 17.

Elijah was sent by God
To speak out against the injustices
Brought on by Ahab and his evil wife, Jezebel.

Even the name Jezebel, today
Conjures up a spirit of evil.

Since the queen was from Sidon
She led Ahab from YHWH, the God of Abraham
To worshipping the god of Baal.

Elijah goes to Ahab and informs him
Of a coming drought.

And then God tells Elijah to flee and hide himself
East of the Jordan River in the region Sidon
The very place where Jezebel is from.

Elijah camps out by a small creek
A wadi, and drinks from its waters
And is fed meat and bread by ravens.

But after a while even the creek dries up
Forcing Elijah to move on
This time to Zarephath.

In Zarephath, Elijah asks a woman gathering sticks
For a drink of water.

As she goes to fetch water for him
Elijah adds that she should also bring bread.

Now, water she could do.

But a morsel of bread
Well, that was more than she thought she could do.

1 Kings 17:12 CEB

¹² **“As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any food; only a handful of flour in a jar and a bit of oil in a bottle. Look at me. I’m collecting two sticks so that I can make some food for myself and my son. We’ll eat the last of the food and then die.”**

We know that life was extra hard for widows
And now with the drought
She and her son were starving to death.

Elijah’s reply to her dreadful situation
Appears that he is only thinking of himself.

1 Kings 17:13 NIV

¹³ **Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But FIRST make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.**

Despite their own dire circumstances
She did as Elijah requested.

She welcomed him into her home
She offered him food and shelter

She demonstrated an incredible generosity
Embodying the true spirit of hospitality

I don't know about you
But I have been the recipient
Of this kind of hospitality.

Once when we were leaving a small compound
In a small village in rural Nigeria
We were given a live chicken
From a poor family in Nigeria

We knew they couldn't afford to do that at all!

The widow in our story
Offered what little she had
And trusted that God would provide.

And guess what, God provided.

The jar of flour, and the bottle of oil
Fed them all for the days the drought remained.

She offered what she had out of a generous heart
And in return, God multiplied her little to a lot.

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Elijah and the widow are powerful reminders
Of God's unwavering provision
And the importance of generosity.

The story also serves as a model for the church.

Just as Elijah, a prophet of God
Was called to confront injustice
And bring God's word to a nation in trouble

So too is the church called
To be a prophetic voice in the world.

We are to speak truth to power
Challenge the status quo
And advocate for the marginalized.

Like Elijah, we are to be bold and unafraid
Even when facing opposition.

Moreover
Elijah was the channel of God's grace and provision.

He fed the widow and her son during a time of famine
Demonstrating God's abundant love and care.

Similarly, the church is called
To be a channel of God's grace
Offering love, compassion, and support
To those in need.

We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked
And shelter the homeless.

We are to be a beacon of hope
In a world overwhelmed with despair.

By embracing our role as Elijah-like figures
The church can make a significant impact
On those around us..

We can be agents of change
Bringing about God's kingdom on earth.

To live up to this high calling is the challenge.

To be a faithful witness to Christ in all that we do
Is our calling.

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In the midst of scarcity God provided abundance

To all who would receive it
God offers blessings, spiritual and physical.

The widow experienced an unexpected blessing.

The church can be an unexpected blessing.

Blessings are not to be hoarded
But shared freely and graciously.

When Jesus told the disciples
To feed the great multitude of five thousand
They said it couldn't be done.

But one small boy, out of his own limited resources
Offered what he had.

And when it was blessed by God
His contribution, like the widow's
Became an overabundance.

Let the church be that small boy and offer what we can.

Let the church be like Elijah and the poor widow
And just see what God can do!

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Through the inspiration of one of our church members
We started collecting clothing
For a ministry on the southside of Richmond

This particular ministry served food
And handed out clothing and furnishings
To provide for the less fortunate.

It was a vital ministry of the church
Even though that [particular ministry
Really challenged the church's resources.

But the church lived by the rule
Out of scarcity comes abundance.

At the same time, WRCoB was approached
By a couple who had fallen on hard times.

They had two rented storage units
Filled with furniture and personal possessions.

This came as a result of a forced downsizing
Due to being given bad advice
Causing them to lose their home.

They had kept these two storage units
Filled with their belongings
In hopes that someday they could use them still

After years of paying rent on the two units
It became apparent they would have to let go
Of those earthly treasures.

Initially, they just wanted it to be behind him
And take everything to the dump

It was difficult to try and auction it off
And impossible to advertise
What they had on Ebay or Craig's list
Due to it being in a stored unit.

They came and spoke to me and asked
If the church could use the two units of belongings.

Take it, store it, and give it away
To people who could use it.

I immediately thought of our church member
Who was involved with the ministry on the southside.

She immediately went to work
And what evolved was a thing of beauty.

The ministry was very interested in the offer.

We selected a date to clear out the two units
Coinciding with a public offering
To a needy neighborhood

We had a great turnout from church.

We went and emptied those two units
Loaded up a 24-foot U-Haul
A trailer and a pickup truck

And took it to the designated location
Where we were met by a crowd of eager people.

The truck was empty in like 30 minutes
And within another 30 minutes
Everything was gone.

Through someone's scarcity came abundance.

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Elijah told the widow bake bread
And share it with him.

She didn't think she could do it.

When the disciples looked to Jesus
In trying to figure out how to feed everyone
Jesus said to them

Matthew 14:16b CEB

You give them something to eat.

The church is called to be God's blessing in the world

Elijah and the widow

And Jesus and the boy's small offering
Are reminders that's God's resources are limitless

God's love shows no bounds

The lesson in our story for today is
That we need to trust in God's provision
Even when facing scarcity.

And to share God's abundance
With those within
And in the communities around us..

As God said to Malachi

Malachi 3:10 NRSV

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.