

Sunday's Sermon

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

November 10, 2024

The Reverend David E. Fox

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Year B) 2024

1 Kings 17.8-16

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

King Ahab was king after the Kingdom of Israel split in twain. Ahab was King of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. He was not a faithful king, at least not faithful to the one true God. Ahab had married a woman whose name is more recognizable than his – Jezebel – a Phoenician woman who worshipped the pagan god, Baal. Ahab had abandoned the one true God and was now following through with Queen Jezebel's agenda of eradicating the priests and prophets of the God of Israel and increasing the number of Baal's prophets and priests in the kingdom. In fact, after our reading for today we have only one prophet – Elijah against four-hundred-fifty of Baal's prophets.

Baal was known as a god who had control over water. So, in response to King Ahab's lack of faithfulness to the one true God, God caused a drought – showing that Baal was nothing. With a drought, you know that both water and food are scarce. A long drought will cause much heartache and many struggles. Elijah, the prophet, relied solely on the Lord for sustenance. The ravens were feeding him in the desert. A specific wadi is where God provided the prophet water. With not living in a desert, we may not know what a wadi is. A wadi, by definition, is a valley that is dry except when it is raining. It is not a small creek, rather it is very much a dry place that on occasion has a trickle of water. It may not have been a gourmet meal, but it was God providing for Elijah's need of hunger and thirst.

Today, we have a portion of the story of the prophet, Elijah, at the home of the unnamed widow. God tells him exactly where he is to travel and who he is to meet. There in the place that God has sent Elijah, the widow was collecting sticks. When he arrives, he asks for water. I'm sure he is parched after his journey and the lack of water on the journey, for he did not have any water to pack with him, because the certain wadi had dried up. Immediately after asking for water, he asks for something to eat. Notice at the ask for water there is no rebuttal. It is not until he asks for food where the woman balks at the prophet's request. In my mind, this means that food is more scarce than water.

The widow bluntly shares that there is not enough to feed him. In fact, she is gathering sticks in order to fire the oven for her and her son's last meal. The woman has been running in survival mode, probably since her husband died. She was at the end of her survival mode and preparing for her and her son to die of starvation. As she stood in front of the prophet, she felt that she had nothing to offer. And I honestly think the prophet felt much the same, "I have nothing to offer this

woman.” He has been spending the past-unidentified amount of time, though we know multiple years, relying on God to provide him food through the ravens and water through the wadi.

Even though the food scarcity has been clearly explained to Elijah, he changes his language from getting a morsel to eat to a small cake of bread. Though a morsel nor a small cake of bread would fill a belly, Elijah is giving us an idea that though the woman feels she has nothing to give, she has more than she thinks. My message for you today is you can live either a life of scarcity or a life of abundance and how much stuff, money, or knowledge you have does not determine whether you live a life of scarcity or abundance. What life are you living? Scarcity or abundance?

I know and you know plenty of households that are making a six-figure-family-income and some that are a seven-figure-family-income that act as if they are no better off than those living in poverty. If you are living in a scarcity mindset, you will never have enough to share. In every congregation, there is a large percentage of folks who give zero money to support their faith community. Why? I don’t think it is because they have hard feelings, otherwise they would just leave. I believe they don’t financially support their faith community because they do not think they have enough to share, or that what little they could share would make no difference.

As much as we want to think that our Old Testament reading is about Elijah or about this unnamed widow, it is not. Our reading is about what God is doing. Throughout this story, God is providing. God provided food for the ravens to both eat and to share with the prophet. God provided water for the wadi so that the prophet and the animals of the wilderness could drink. God provided Elijah with a story to share and a faith to fully rely on God. God provided for the widow and her son, not only when the husband and father were present, not only when there was plenty of water, but God provided for her through and through. When she was preparing to die, because she felt she had nothing left, God still provided for her to go on.

Today, we will pray the Lord’s prayer; and we will say the line, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Everyone who is hearing this sermon, knows they have more than just their daily needs met. You are living a life of abundance, even if you choose to recognize it or not. It is 2024 and Americans are throwing away leftovers while there are other parts of the world where people are relying on others to give them enough rice, oats, or porridge to live another day. We have enough.

There is a level of maturity that not all people reach. That level of maturity is to recognize that you have enough – where you stop chasing after more and more money and more and more stuff – and instead of trying to get more, you are trying to figure out how to give away more and more. And I’m not just talking finances here. I’m talking overall generosity – money, time, energy, knowledge, talents, etc. Those are the people who we look up to in our congregation. We are commenting about how much they do for their faith community and have a deep respect for them and all they put in for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And the truth is, the faithful and generous few, just need the majority of you to start living generously with whatever little you can offer. And you may be thinking, “Pastor, why should we give anything away?” And my response is, “Because God blessed you with all that you have and all that you are.”

If you’ve never volunteered at a church event, sign-up for the next one. If you’ve never committed to giving to the church weekly or monthly, start with something. If you’ve never shared how Jesus

is making a difference in your life, share it with someone you know very well. You will never see that you have more to give than you thought until you start sharing and giving. Those who are very generous in our church will tell you that nothing is missing from their lives by being generous. They might even tell you they feel more complete, because they understand their purpose and calling in life.

The two widows from the Old Testament and the Gospel teach us that no gift is too little; that even in poverty, we still have something to share and can live a life of abundance and that God continues to provide for our every need. It's time we who have everything learn from these women who had nothing. Living a life of abundance is living generously, no matter what economic or social class we find ourselves. It's time we not only become generous people, living lives of abundance, but it is also time for us to become a generous church, sharing our abundance of God's love and all the people of this church have to offer.

The unnamed widow made Elijah a small cake of bread, and then she made her and her son a cake of bread. The jar of meal was not emptied. The jug of oil did not fail. This woman's life was turned from scarcity to abundance. God is abundantly providing for you. Now, today and every day, you get to decide what kind of life you are going to live. Will you choose scarcity, or will you choose abundance?