

Sermon Preached by Pastor Jennifer Rose

November 8, 2015

“Giving It All”

Dear friends in Christ: Grace be unto you and peace from our lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When Sara and her husband had moved into an older house, there was no air conditioning in the house. It was the middle of the summer, and her husband kept taking the portable fan from the baby’s room to blow on himself because he was so hot. After a few weeks, Sara said, “You know, hun, we should really get another fan from Home Depot if you need another fan so badly, because that’s the fan for the baby. But have you tried using the ceiling fan?” Sara’s husband looked up at the ceiling and laughed. He had been sleeping in that room for three weeks, staring at that ceiling fan, wishing for a fan, not even realizing a fan was right there in front of him that whole time.

How many of you have done a similar thing? You think, “Where’s my wallet? Oh, yeah, it’s in my pocket.” Or, “Where are my keys? Oh yeah, they’re in my hand.” Have you ever looked at your cell phone, wondering where your phone is? Sometimes as Christians we’re asking God for a fan when we’ve been staring at the fan we already have.

This morning’s first reading from 1 Kings is a story about Elijah and a widow with next to nothing. I think this story can teach us much about seeing the blessings we already have. Elijah knows the widow doesn’t have much, but he reassures her that what she has is enough. The LORD sends Elijah to Zarephath in Sidon, which is enemy territory. Elijah is risking his life to go there, and Elijah has no provisions with him, either. So Elijah himself will have to depend on others for his survival. The people are suffering from a drought and no one has very much to eat or drink. God simply tells Elijah to find a widow who will feed him. And low and behold, when he arrives in Zarephath, there is a widow gathering sticks.

Now, I’m sure there was more than one widow in Zarephath. Elijah had no reason to think that this was THE widow the LORD was talking about, but he gives it a shot and calls to her, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.” And she does, but then he adds, “Oh yeah, and bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” But she says, “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.”

This story is so crazy that there is really a little bit of humor here. I mean, can you imagine? The nerve of Elijah. Here is this old woman – a widow – who really had NOTHING, I mean NOTHING... and she is down to their very last bit of flour. You can kind of imagine the scene... she’s over here, bent over, gathering sticks so that she can prepare their very last meal so she can give it to her son and then die. Can you even imagine being that down on your luck? Can you imagine being that hungry? Down to the last handful of flour. And Elijah has the nerve to holler over to this woman and say, “Oh hey there, bring me some water, and... while you’re at it... feed me!” I’m surprised she didn’t laugh in his face.

A drink of water may already be a sacrifice for the widow, but she is unsure about giving away the last food that she has to a complete stranger. But Elijah reassures her, "DO NOT BE AFRAID...For thus says the LORD the God of Israel, The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil *will not fail* until the day that the LORD send rain on the earth." She trusts what Elijah says, she trusts in the words of the LORD, and her meal and oil do not run out. She is able to feed herself, her son, and Elijah as well with what she has. God's promise does not fail. The jar is never emptied.

Elijah does not focus on everything that the widow does not have; he just points out what she has and reassures her that it will be enough. Sometimes we look for a fan when we already have a fan. Our first instinct too often in life is to panic about what we don't have, rather than celebrate what we do. We panic that we've lost our cell phone, when it's really just in our pocket.

We look at what we have and doubt that we have enough. We think we need more. We start to become afraid. We look at the money in our bank account and wonder if it is enough. We look at the hours in the day and wonder if they are enough. We worry about what we do not have. We are afraid.

But listen to the words of Elijah, "*Do not be afraid.*" The widow of Zarephath is in a life or death situation, she thinks. She barely has enough to survive. She is afraid. Elijah calms her fears by pointing out what she has. She has a little flour, and a little oil. She doesn't have much, but it will be enough, because God says it's enough.

Martin Luther once said that security is the world's greatest idol. Think about that, security is our greatest idol. Our own security becomes our god for us, because we are afraid to risk trusting in the one true God to provide for our needs. We hold on to what we have because we assume it's not enough. We look for another fan, forgetting that we already have a fan. We worry about everything we don't have, instead of trusting that what we have is a gift from God that will not fail.

Where our story is different from Elijah and the widow's story is that Elijah and the widow have next to nothing. They depend on God for their very survival. God doesn't promise them any five-star restaurant meal, but enough meal and oil to be able to eat and live. God provides. We live in a society that tells us that what we have is not enough, which is absolutely ridiculous when we look at all we have. Did you know that if you own a car, you are among the wealthiest one percent on this planet? We are extremely wealthy. But it is not enough for us to have a car and a house and food on the table. No, we want much more, and we fail to be satisfied with what we have. We make security into our god, continuing to save up and buy all this stuff so that if anything should happen, we would have way more than enough than just to survive. We neglect to thank God for providing abundantly more than just what we need to survive. Instead, we worry about our own security.

A mother wanted to teach her daughter about giving. She gave the little girl a one dollar bill and a 20 dollar bill for church. "Put whichever one you want on the offering plate and keep the other for yourself," she told the girl. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. "Well," said the little girl, "I was going to give the twenty dollars, but just before the collection the pastor said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I'd be a lot more cheerful if I gave the one dollar, so I did." In all seriousness though, some of the most joyful givers in our congregation are our children. I wish you could see their faces as they come forward for the children's

offering. I watch them approach the children's offering basket with smiles as wide as their faces, skipping the whole way down the aisle. That joy is contagious!

There was a recent study done about what makes people joyful. The people in the study who described themselves as joyful were rich, poor, young, old, from very different backgrounds. Yet they all had one thing in common. Can you guess what that was? It's a four-letter word. Risk. All of these joyful people were willing to take risks. They were not afraid. Elijah is not afraid, but takes a risk, goes to a foreign, hostile country and finds the widow that God provides. The widow listens to Elijah and instead of being afraid, she takes a risk and shares her last meal with a complete stranger. The widow in the gospel takes a risk and gives all she has to help the poor, even though she is poor herself.

When the widow generously shares her meager meal with Elijah, she is connected with the bounty of the universe and, indeed, "her cup overflows." She discovers in her risky generosity that the abundance of God will supply her basic needs. In our own lives, we find that while generosity does not magically change our bank accounts or reverse the hands of the clock, open-hearted generosity opens us to experiencing a generous universe in which we discover we have more time, energy, and money than we previously imagined. In letting go of our strangle hold on our resources, we discover that we are connected with the abundant resources of God.

To be God's joyful people, we are called to take risks. Taking risks means trusting in God and not our own security. We are called to share what we have even in the midst of a drought. We are called to see what we have and trust that it is enough, even when it doesn't look like much. God shows us that we already have a fan when we're looking for a fan. God provides, so we don't have to be afraid. We can take risks because we have a God who will not fail us. May we be blessed with God's joy when we take a risk and trust in the LORD. Thanks be to God. Amen.