

**Text: 1 Kings 17:8-16 (NIV)**

<sup>8</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to him: <sup>9</sup>“Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.” <sup>10</sup>So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” <sup>11</sup>As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.” <sup>12</sup>“As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.” <sup>13</sup>Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup>For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.’” <sup>15</sup>She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. <sup>16</sup>For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

***Theme: The Gift that Keeps on Giving***

We have probably all heard the phrase, “The gift that keeps on giving.” This was actually the slogan for a company that made record players, which was copyrighted in 1926. The copyright has long run out, but the phrase is still used today in many ways.

I thought that it fit well with this story because this woman’s gift to Elijah didn’t stop. It kept producing and producing, but God’s gifts to her didn’t stop either. Her generosity was a gift that kept on giving.

I. It is surprising that Elijah came to this woman.

She was a Gentile. Elijah had predicted a drought to King Ahab. When it came, God sent Elijah east of the Jordan River to a brook called Cherith. There the Lord miraculously provided for His prophet through ravens, who brought him food to eat. However, that brook dried up, and God sent Elijah north of Israel to this town of Zarephath, which was near Tyre and Sidon. This time God chose a widow, who would give Elijah the food that he needed.

This woman, however, was not Jewish. Yet, she said to Elijah, “*As the Lord your God lives.*” She knew Israel’s God. She trusted that He was the living God. What I am not sure of, is whether she knew at this point that the God of Israel could be her God also. But through this experience, she would come to believe that Israel’s God was her God too.

It’s interesting that Jesus would travel to this same region during His ministry. He also met a woman who pleaded for Him to help her daughter. The Lord tested her faith, but He ended up exclaiming, “*Woman, you have great faith!*” (Mt 15:28) The woman in our text would also display a great faith.

She was also poor. She had been gathering sticks at the city gate. When you think about it, that is an odd place to gather firewood. It would be like looking for wood along our ditch. You might find some sticks and stubble, but not real firewood. This woman was so poor that she could afford no

more food. The drought had made its way to Phoenicia. All that she had left was a handful of flour and a little bit of oil. When that was gone, she thought that she and her son would starve to death. This woman was not much different from the widow in today's Gospel lesson who gave her last coins. Both of them were very poor.

This teaches us that the best examples of Christian generosity are not those people whom we might expect. She was an outsider and very poor, and yet she was very generous. We often want to judge the book by its cover. That is what the disciples did in today's Gospel lesson. They saw many people give large gifts, but Jesus said that many of those people got rich in ways that we not very ethical. Generosity is also not just sharing what we have left over. The author Jack London once said, "**A bone to the dog is not charity. Charity is the bone shared with the dog, when you are just as hungry as the dog.**" We don't always know the best examples of Christian generosity. They are often the people that we least expect. They share the blessings that God has given to them in a quiet way, even when it is difficult. They do so cheerfully and willingly out of thanksgiving for all that the Lord has given to them and in faith that He will continue to provide.

II. This woman's gift also came out of a heart of faith.

Things were looking very grim for this woman when Elijah came. She was about to prepare what she thought would be her last meal. Then the prophet asked her to give him that meal. It seemed like he was asking for everything that she had. But then Elijah gave her a promise. He said, "*The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.*" The woman lived in that faith that God would provide her with what she needed. She could be generous to the Lord's prophet in faith that God would not forsake her. It was the same way with the widow in today's Gospel lesson who gave all that she had. She gave her mites in the faith that God would continue to provide what she needed.

As Christians we give of our time, our talent, and our treasures in faith in God's love for us. It is not always easy to be generous with any of these things. When we encounter someone in need, we wonder how we can help them. When times get tough, we wonder whether we can give anything to the Lord. We often feel so stressed with so little time, that we can't help someone. We feel like this woman that we have nothing more to give. But faith is trusting that God will provide. He will not leave us or forsake us. We pray to Him, "Give us this day our daily bread." We live in peace that He will hear that prayer. Faith trusts that God will provide, especially in the most difficult times.

III. God didn't disappoint her.

The woman did as Elijah said. As long as the drought lasted, neither the flour nor the oil ran out. God provided what she needed. But that didn't mean that there were no more tests to her faith. A short time later her son died. She complained to Elijah, "*What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?*" However, God also helped her in this time of need. God used Elijah to raise her son from the dead. Her faith was strengthened again.

This section is a reminder of Psalm 37:25, "*I was young and now I am old, yet I have ever seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely.*" When we look back, we see that God never forsakes His people. There are times when He tests our faith,

but He does that to make us even more sure of His grace when we receive His help.

But how can we be so sure of God's grace? How can I be sure that He will never leave me or forsake me? The answer is in Romans 8 where Paul writes, "*What then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all how will He not also along with Him, graciously give us all things?*" God loved us so much that He gave up His dearest treasure, His own Son. Jesus gave up His perfect life as the payment for all of our sins on the cross. There are times when we feel that someone doesn't deserve our help, but we never deserved the grace that God showed to us when He gave His Son for us. It was while we were still sinners, that Christ died for us. In Christ, we see the great love of God. He has paid our debt in full and filled us with the riches of His righteousness. He also promises us the riches of His glory when He calls us from this life. (Eph 1) If God loved us that much, we can be sure that He will be with us, give us what we need in this life, and deliver us from every evil. There are some preachers, especially on tv, that promise that if you pay your tithe to them, that God will give you everything that you want. God never promises to give you all that you want, but He does promise to give your daily bread, His forgiveness, and His deliverance from all evil until He calls you to His eternal glory in Christ.

Dear Christian friends, we are facing tough times. Many of us are short on money. Others are short on time. It is tempting to say, I'll take care of my needs and wants first. If something is left over, I will share with God and other people. But that is not the example that the widow of Zarephath gives to us. Christian stewardship is usually learned in the hard times, rather than the good times. She teaches us Christian generosity as we trust in God's goodness for us in every circumstance in life. Such Christian generosity is really the gift that keeps on giving because it helps those who are in need and helps to extend the work of our Lord's church, but it also makes us confident of God's goodness and grace for us. According to God's own word, He will never forsake those who are faithful to Him. May He grant each of us that faith in His goodness, that we may be as generous as He has been to us.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard  
Benediction Lutheran Church  
Milwaukee, WI  
November 8, 2009***