

GIVING WITH ALL YOUR MITE

1 Kings 17:10-16; Luke 21:1-4

Intro: At about 10:00 p.m. on September 1st of last year, Sheila and Andrew were in their van, with Fiona as a passenger, and they were traveling on a desolate stretch of Pennsylvania Highway 120 – and that’s saying something because all of 120 is desolate – but this was especially so. The fact that it was pitch dark adds to the desolation though – but I digress. They had passed through a little hole in the wall hamlet by the name of Driftwood a few miles back, and now they were heading east for the final 45-minute drive to our family cabin in the mountains of Pennsylvania. (Tell the story)

Everybody wanted to help and they did. They were generous with their time talents and possessions. It was a wonderful reminder of how good people can be. We were blessed by their generosity.

God is blessed by our generosity too. Here in North America we enjoy a standard of living that is the envy of most other parts of the world, and for the most part, we take it for granted. But it’s true of Americans that we are a generous people. And even though many are reluctant to admit it, Christians lead the way in charitable giving in our country by a long shot. But even so, American Christians, on average, only give about 2% of their income which is far short of the Old Testament standard, which was required by the Law of Moses, which was a tithe (or tenth) of their increase. Jesus came along with a different kind of requirement, he wants all of us.

Our thought for today, on the front of our bulletin says, “*Generosity is easy when our hands are full.*” But the example we have from our texts for today comes from two widows who gave all they had. The first one we will look at is the widow of Zarephath, who gave the last remnants of her food to provide a meal for the prophet Elijah. And the other is the extremely poor widow who came past Jesus and his disciples as they observed the offering basket in the temple and gave her last two pennies or mites, which is an old word for a very small amount – the size of the tiny larvae of lice. Like her, we need to be giving with all our mite. Let’s learn from these generous heroes of the faith.

First, the widow of Zarephath. Listen:

(Read 1 Kings 17:10-16)

Some background is helpful. In the opening verses to 1 Kings 17 we read that the prophet Elijah has been standing up to King Ahab who had married a pagan woman and had adopted her wicked religion. This had angered God, and his message through Elijah was that there would be a terrible drought throughout the region. Elijah made himself scarce after this confrontation with Ahab, and God had miraculously sustained him as he sheltered along a brook east of the Jordan River. The Lord did this for Elijah by sending bread and meat carried by ravens. This went on for a period of time until the effects of the drought expanded and the stream dried up. Then God told him, “*Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.*” 1 Kings 17:9. So Elijah did just that and traveled to the Gentile town along the Mediterranean Coast. It was upon his arrival there that he asked for a drink of water from a poor lady and her son who were gathering wood – which, we soon find, was for there their final meal before they starved to death.

God chose her

- This unlikely candidate was chosen and commanded of God to provide for Elijah. What is the job description of a giver? Well, quite simply, it’s to be available and to be willing. Riches are not required.
- It was dry! The drought had gone on so long that no one really remembered what it was like before and they, no doubt, wondered if it would ever end. It was a drought in a land that never gets much moisture in the first place. And here is a poor widow with no resources and she is the one chosen to sustain Elijah.
- Without hesitation she turned to get him a drink of the precious commodity, water. You see . . .

Generosity comes without hesitation

- We hear no response from the widow. She didn’t whine that it was too hot, or ask why didn’t he get it himself, or ask the rich guy on the other side of the tracks to spare some of his water? It just indicates she turned to go and get the water.
- Her response was selfless – God knew what he was doing when he chose her and Elijah knew she was the widow God had commanded – so she wasn’t only selfless, she was obedient.

- Then the real test came when Elijah asked, “And when you’re in the kitchen can you bring me a bit of bread?” That was when she revealed the situation in her cupboards – they were empty. And the flour canister had just enough to mix with the tiny bit of olive oil in the flask and make a little cake for her and her son, and then they would waste away. They had no bit of bread for this guest.
- Elijah suggested a solution . . .

Generosity looks at what’s left and gives that too

- Make a cake for me, and then make a cake for your son and then make a cake for yourself, and don’t worry – you’ll be able to do that for every meal until the drought is over. So she did. And they did. And God did what he promised through his servant, Elijah. This, in ABC parlance is **YOU CANNOT OUTGIVE GOD**.
- We do well when we realize that . . .

Generosity is doing as God says

- Our text says *For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘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.’” And she went and did as Elijah said.* 1 Kings 17:14-15a. **Thus says the Lord** is pretty serious business. But it’s also **sound business** and it pays off. She went and did as Elijah said and without hesitation and holding nothing back.
- We never are told what this widow’s name is, but she is a hero of the faith we learn from 3,000 years later. She gave everything and received everything.
- Now, let me give a brief finish to this talk by holding up another unnamed heroine of the faith. She was . . .

The widow who gave with all her mite

- Listen to the short text (**Read Luke 21:1-4**)
- Again, some background is helpful:
 - This is somewhere in the middle of Holy Week. Jesus rode into town on a donkey with everyone shouting “Hosanna!” a couple days before, and a couple days later he would be on trial with everyone yelling, “Crucify him!”
 - Jesus was doing some final teaching with his disciples and they are in the temple where there is a waiting lesson on giving to the Kingdom.
 - They are at the temple where, around the grounds, there are 13 receptacles. We use offering baskets and maybe they did too, or maybe theirs were of pottery, but they were for the purpose of receiving the offerings of the faithful.
 - This woman would have been in the court of women as she placed her offering in the plate – but as Jesus and his friends looked around they would see the rich putting their bags of coins into the plates and it was probably quite a production.
- And Jesus made this point about generosity using the unfolding scene in front of them . . .

The rich gave a lot and the widow gave a little, but she gave the most

- The widow gave everything. In contrast the rich gave a little, because, remember, *Generosity is easy when our hands are full*.
- Now, as I pointed out a bit ago, we know nothing about this lady. She is unnamed and we don’t know why she was so poor, we just know that Jesus knew, and that was enough.
- Yes! Jesus knows. That is how, like these ladies who gave obediently and without hesitation, and with selflessness, and with extreme generosity, we can give with all our mite too – **because Jesus knows**. He knows our needs and he knows our wants and he will provide. He is Jehovah Jireh – our provider. We cannot out-give him.

Conclusion: So why did I give this talk on giving? Am I worried about our offerings? Honestly, no.

Am I worried that you’re not giving enough? Honestly, no – I don’t know what you give.

Do I want a raise? NOPE! You take such good care of me that I’m extremely humbled.

Do I have projects in mind like an expanded ministry or a new sanctuary or a gym or a new parking lot or anything that costs money? No. there are projects we have in the works, but God and his people are providing.

Here’s why I’m preaching on this this week and next: **WE NEED TO BE REMINDED!** And, as your pastor, I must teach you the entire Gospel, so I’m remiss if I don’t. But more than that:

Giving is an act of worship.

Giving is a reminder that God gave everything for us – *For God so loved the world that he gave . . .* John 3:16a. We love God and his world, so we give too.

Giving is a continuation of what the faithful have done down through holy history like the two heroines we looked at this morning and countless others since.

Giving is an act of obedience

Giving is selfless

Giving is acknowledging who is really in control. So, we too give everything with all our mite. Amen.