

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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***"The Grace of Giving"*
Stewardship series**

1 Kings 17:7-16

Giving Affected by Our Attitude

**Hymns: *This is My Father's World* –
489 – Closing: 250**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to him:⁹ "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."¹⁰ 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?"¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

¹² "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."

¹³ 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."¹⁴ 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.' "

¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.

1 Kings 17:7-16

For a long time, God had been providing for his prophet in a miraculous way. In the midst of an epic drought, Elijah was given water in a brook that didn't go dry and was fed by ravens that brought him bread and meat. But now, that would change. Elijah had

approached a woman with a rather pedestrian request. Provide a little drink of water and a piece of bread to eat, so that his physical needs might be met and his work might continue.

Here was a way for this woman to support God's work and to support God's worker. And really, it certainly wasn't much that the woman was being asked to offer. How many people could have supplied what he was looking for from the scraps off of their tables? How many people could have provided for Elijah so much more?

But of all the people to whom God could have sent Elijah to find support, Elijah was sent by God to this woman, and it was to her that this appeal for a little water and a piece of bread was to be presented. It was this woman who was asked by God to give. What a unique opportunity; what a blessed privilege!

But for this woman, at this time, that request was simply too much.

You see, this woman was at the end of the road. As a widow, she had never had much; she had always struggled to find enough to provide for herself and her son. But the recent drought had made matters worse. The reality as Elijah approached her with his request was that she was actually preparing to use her last bit of flour and oil to make a meal that she thought would be her last.

So it didn't matter how much this woman might have wanted to help, there was just no way that she could give. It had nothing to do with attitude; it had nothing to do with desire; it had everything to do with the reality of resources. And she simply didn't have the resources available. It turns out that Elijah had come to the wrong person to fulfill his simple need; to support his work.

Have you ever felt like that woman? Maybe the circumstances weren't quite so dire, but the same problem presented itself.

God has chosen to take his Word to the world through people whom he calls to be pastors and teachers, missionaries and evangelists; they are people who have physical needs, they do work that comes with cost. And though God could certainly provide for his workers and his work through his almighty, miraculous hand; though he could move the wealthiest people in the world to give so that there would never be anything close to a shortage of resources for his work; instead God has come to you, and he has asked you to give; he has asked you to provide for his work and his workers. What a unique opportunity; what a blessed privilege!

But how often doesn't that request just seem like it is too much!

I can't tell you how many times in my life I've felt like this woman when I've been asked to support God's work and his workers. It's happened when that appeal letter arrives in the mail. It tells me all about the work that our WELS missionary is doing in this

country or that, it tells me how important this work is, it tells me that support is needed for it to continue. Yet, often times I've dropped that letter in the recycling bin while thinking, "I'd love to give, but that letter came amidst five other bills, and right now, those are where my money needs to go." There have even been times when I've received that letter and logged onto the website, and entered my card number, and put in the number of my donation, and then had my mouse hover with hesitation over the submit button until the reality of my checking account caused me instead to click cancel.

Have you ever felt that hesitation as you've dropped your envelope in the plate? Has uncertainty ever kept you from hitting "Submit Payment" on the online donation? Have you ever said, "You're asking the wrong person at the wrong time."

"If I give to this ministry," you might reason, "how will I pay that bill." "If I dig down deep every time they ask...well, there's only so far I can dig." "And so it doesn't really matter how much I want to give," you might say, "This has nothing to do with my desire. I'd love to give, but it's simply too much. This is all about reality." And the reality is that I've lost my job, or I've had a health emergency, or I'm experiencing a bad break and finding it very difficult to provide for my family." So, when the appeal to support God's work and his workers comes, the response of that widow is echoed from our own mouths, "I don't have anything to give."

Yet, look at how Elijah responded to that woman who simply couldn't afford to give? He said nothing about her resources; he said nothing about her ability to give. Instead, he confronted the uncertainty that brought so much fear and worry into her life. He said, **"Don't be afraid."**

And as he acknowledged the important responsibility that had been given to this woman; as he encouraged her to continue to care for her son; notice carefully what he said, **"Go home and do as you have said, but first make a cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son."**

Elijah encouraged this woman to give first to God's work and his worker, even when her life was filled with so much uncertainty. And it wasn't because Elijah was greedy, insensitive, and selfish. This woman was not lacking the resources to be able to give, she was lacking the proper attitude. Fear and worry were in her heart when trust and confidence were needed. So, Elijah told her to not be afraid because there was nothing to worry about. He asked her to give because she had a promise from God.

God told this woman that if she put aside her fear and uncertainty and gave first to God, her physical needs would be met. **"Don't be afraid," Elijah encouraged, "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.' "

When we come before God and meet his requests to support his work with the rebuttal that we simply don't have the resources, God responds just as Elijah responded to that widow. Listen to what Jesus says in our Gospel: **"Therefore, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body...Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"**

As we so often point to our resources saying, "We can't afford to give anymore," Jesus singles out a much different problem. He confronts the uncertainty that brings the worry and fear into our lives.

And look where he directs our focus, **"Don't run after all these things which your heavenly Father knows that you need. Rather, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness"** (Matthew 6:33).

It is never a lack of resources that keeps us from giving; instead, our giving is always affected by our attitude. As we consider giving, we often have our focus in the wrong place. We think about ourselves first, and then God's kingdom.

So Jesus, who always puts us first before himself in his work as our Savior, encourages us to give first to God's work and his workers.

And he tells us that we can do that with confidence because we have the same source of promise that this widow had. **"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness," Jesus says, "and all these things will be given to you as well."** God has promised that we have no reason to worry; God has promised that there is nothing uncertain in our lives. God has promised that he will always take care of us.

So, that brings us to the big question, and it is not whether you have enough to give. No, the question really is: "Will you trust enough to give?"

Maybe you need a little proof. Listen to what happened to the widow: **"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."**¹⁶ **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."**

That widow found out that the Lord keeps his promises. You and I, through the words of Scripture, through the work of the cross, through the empty tomb, we already know that God keeps his promises. Through those kept promises, may God give each of us the trusting attitude that is needed to give as he has asked us to do. Amen.