

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
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2 Kings 4:8-37

Lessons from a "Great Woman"

- 1. A lesson about supporting God's work**
- 2. A lesson about faith in the face of death**

Hymns: 221 – 413 – 606 – 607

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

2 Kings 4:8-37 –

One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'" She replied, "I have a home among my own people." "What can be done for her?" Elisha asked. Gehazi said, "Well, she has no son and her husband is old." Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms." "No, my lord," she objected. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.

The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. "My head! My head!" he said to his father. His father told a servant, "Carry him to his mother." After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out. She called her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return." "Why go to him today?" he asked. "It's not the New Moon or the Sabbath." "It's all right," she said.

She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Lead on; don't slow down for me unless I tell you." So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, "Look! There's the Shunammite! Run to meet her and ask her, 'Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?'" "Everything is all right," she said. When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why."

"Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes?'" Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy's face." But the child's mother said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So he got up and followed her.

Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, "The boy has not awakened." When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite." And he did. When she came, he said, "Take your son." She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

Who is on your list of "great heroes of faith?"

- Noah, who built the ark and endured ridicule in the corrupt world he lived in
- Moses, the greatest prophet of the OT, who received the very laws of God.
- Abraham, whom we're currently learning about in Bible Class. He followed the call of God to an unknown location.
- David, who stood up against the giant Goliath.
- Stephen, who gave his life as the first martyr.
- Paul, who selflessly and tirelessly missionized the Mediterranean world after his conversion.
- How about... the Shunammite woman?

The Shunammite woman? She may not have made your list of heroes of faith. **Yet today we will focus on 2 Kings 4 and learn profound lessons from the Shunammite woman. We will learn:**

- 1. A lesson about supporting God's work**
- 2. A lesson about faith in the face of death**

1 – We read, *“One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. She said to her husband, ‘I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. Let’s make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us.’”* Let’s set the scene of where this takes place. Elisha served as a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel after they had separated from the southern kingdom of Judah after King Solomon’s reign. The village of Shunem lay in a valley in the north central area of Palestine. In his ministry, Elisha had to travel from the south cities of Samaria (capital of the northern kingdom) and Gilgal (a religious center) to Mount Carmel in the northwest. He would naturally pass through Shunem on these trips. Also, the king had a summer palace at Shunem.

Map:



Our text tells us that a well-to-do woman invited him in for a meal. Literally, she is called her a “great” woman. She evidently knew he was a traveling prophet and showed him hospitality. As she got to know Elisha, it became clear to her that he was indeed a man of God to be supported. So not only did she give him a regular meal, she also talked to her husband about the possibility of putting a room on their house for the prophet to stay in if he needed it during his travels. How generous of this woman to provide this for Elisha! We might compare her to some of the NT women that provided for Jesus and served him during his earthly ministry.

Elisha felt that she should be rewarded for her generosity to him in his ministry. So he called his assistant, Gehazi, and asked him to summon her. He said, *“You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?”* She replied, *“I have a home among my own people.”* *“What can be done for her?”* Elisha asked. Gehazi said, *“Well, she has no son and her husband is old.”* Then Elisha said, *“Call her.”* So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. *“About this time next year,”* Elisha said, *“you will hold a son in your arms.”*

What a humble attitude she exhibited! The Shunammite woman did not expect anything in return. She didn’t even horn into his room when summoned, but respectfully waited outside. When Elisha offered to call in some favors for her to the king and the government, she said she was satisfied and content with the station of life she was enjoying among her people. She didn’t need favors or a promotion! But God chose to reward this humble woman anyway. She had not been blessed with a son, but she would be now. In one year she would have a child.

Let’s pause and learn our first lesson from this woman of faith. **We see a wonderful example of a believer who supported God’s work.**

Think for a moment about the role a church should have in a believer’s life. The main reason a church exists is to serve people with God’s Word. Holy Trinity should serve its members and community with the Word of God. Our church needs to proclaim the message of law, telling all that their sin has condemned them and left them in need of a Savior. Our church must honestly speak the truth that people are damned by their own condition. Then to the penitent our church has the

beautiful message that Christ our Savior gave his life on the cross and rose victoriously for our salvation. This is the primary function of our church. It should also baptize your children. It should offer its instructed people the Lord's Supper.

However, it doesn't stop there. Today we learn that out of God's grace he allows his saved people to assist in the work that their church does. God's people can help in this mission! How can you be a "Shunammite woman" for your congregation? It depends on your position. How can you serve so your church's mission is enhanced?

- You can pray for our church and school
- You can bring your firstfruit offerings to support our work at Holy Trinity
- You might see a way to lend your musical talents to our worship services
- Someone with an interest in money and accounting might become involved in our financial workings
- You can teach children or adults if you're qualified
- You might notice a job on the building that needs to be done and lend a hand
- You can clean God's house for our weekend services
- You could assist with other ladies in communion setup and take-down
- You could serve in an elected position
- You could volunteer in MANY ways with our school

In all these ways, you can follow the Shunammite woman's example!

And what about rewards? Hopefully the first thought you have would be, "Rewards and recognition are not necessary!" Jesus said in Luke 17: "*So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'*" We don't seek rewards, but in his goodness the Lord will allow you to experience them:

- Even if nobody else knows what you did or how hard you worked, the Lord can grant you an inner satisfaction that you benefited his kingdom

- If your service led you to have contact with people, you might see some children's bright faces or receive some hugs. Your friendship with others in the body of Christ might grow.
- You might even see tangible results from your efforts: Converts who believe, people who join our church, part of the building that's enhanced, offerings that allow us to have a second pastor.

May we learn a lesson about from the Shunammite woman in how we support God's work!

2 — As meaningful as that lesson is, we have another one to learn from her today. We learn it in the second half of the story, where we read, "*The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. 'My head! My head!' he said to his father. His father told a servant, 'Carry him to his mother.'* After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died." The story takes a tragic turn. What exactly happened to the boy? He had grown up, old enough to tag along with his father to the fields. But as he hung out with the reapers one day, he cried out, "My head! My head!" We don't know exactly what happened. Did he have a form of sunstroke in the oppressive Middle Eastern heat? Did he suffer an unfortunate fall or an accident? We're not told. All we know is that he was carried back to his mother's lap where he remained the rest of the morning until he died at noon. What a severe trial the Lord placed on her!

However, we see her faith in the midst of this trial. We see that she held out hope that not all was lost in what she did:

She took the boy to the prophet's room and placed him on his bed.

She took a servant and a donkey to hurriedly go to Elisha. He was at Mt. Carmel, 20 miles away.

When she was in the distance, Elisha sent Gehazi to hurry and ask her what was happening. He asked, "Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?" And she told him, "Everything is all right." Literally, Elisha used the word SHALOM in his question. "Are you at peace?" Perhaps you're familiar with the word

SHALOM. SHALOM has many meanings attached to it. The feeling is that all is good with you. There's a completeness and a fulfillment in life. Relationships are good between you and God and also between you and your fellow man. She told Gehazi, "Everything is all right" (SHALOM).

When she arrived at the prophet's feet, she had questions. We learn that it's not wrong to have questions during a trial. She wonders why she was given the son in the first place. She hadn't even asked for him, and now she is stricken with grief. Yet we see her faith still held out that the situation could be changed in how she would not leave Elisha when he sent his assistant back to Shunem, but firmly insisted he come also.

We then read about the remarkable details of how Elisha laid himself out on the boy and how he prayed fervently that God would give him his earthly life back. He paced the room and prayed more. And after stretching himself out on the boy again, the lad sneezed seven times and God gave his earthly life back!

What lesson can we learn from this amazing account? We learn deep lessons about life and death. When it is clear that death is approaching, what attitude can a believer have? We see in our reading that it's not wrong to ask questions, but might a person's attitude cross the line and blame God for what's happening? We may be tempted to accuse God of doing us or a loved one wrong. We might be tempted to claim, "I deserve better!" We might forget that as a sinful mortal, we're a beggar who deserves nothing from a holy God.

Rather, when death approaches a Christian can say, "Everything is all right" or "I have peace." How can he say this? The Christian knows of the joy that their Savior has brought them. He knows the forgiveness of sins is his through faith. Jesus won their place in heaven and they are assured that he will safely bring them there: "*In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*" (John 14:2,3)

What lessons do we learn for when death arrives? Because death is not a natural part of God's design, it is a time of shock and grief, even if it has been expected. What can a Christian who has lost a loved one say? Can he say, "Everything is all

right. I have peace." If you've been there, you know these are not easy words to say. Yet what does Scripture say?

- "*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)
- "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*" (John 11:25-26)

The miracle Elisha performed shows God's power over death. That same power will raise our loved ones and our bodies from the grave one day to live in heaven forever. This leads us to say, "Everything is all right."

I remember watching a news report years ago after a plane crashed taking off from New York City, killing over 200 people on board. The news reporter at the airport said, "Imagine saying good-bye to your loved ones and never seeing them again." Is that the mourning believer's perspective at the time of a death? An actual picture of what has happened can be found in the family game "Trouble." If you've played that game with the dice popper, you know that as you move around the board from your Start space, trouble abounds! People can land on you and send you back to start. But once a token has moved off the track into the "safety" zone, you can relax. Your token is home safe; no one can give it any more trouble! In the same way, when death arrives at the doorstep of a believer we will have grief, tears, and sadness. Yet we know that trouble is over. **Another one is home safe with Jesus!**

Who is on your list of heroes of faith? Perhaps you have one more now! Along with Noah, Moses, Abraham, and Paul you can add **the Shunammite woman:**

- 1. She teaches us lessons about supporting God's work**
- 2. She teaches us lessons about faith in the face of death**

May God plant these lessons deep in our hearts as we live our life of faith! Amen