Discovering God's Blessings Through Giving

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*Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, **9** "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." **10** So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." **11** As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." **12** But she said, "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." **13** Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. **14** 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 sends rain on the earth." **15** She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. **16** The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah*. (1 Kings 17:8-16)

1. My Visit to Grandview UMC

This past week, I was so happy to visit Grandview UMC during my trip to Kansas City, MO. Grandview was the first church I served as an associate pastor. I was appointed for the first time after my ordination and have many wonderful memories there.

The church building is the same but the people are very different. Some previous members have moved or passed away. There is a new pastor and many new church members. In the message on Sunday, the pastor spoke about some of the things that the church is doing in the community. The church has a mission center called, "Debbie's Place Clothes Closet." Church members and people in the community collect old clothes and donate money to buy care packages for children. Volunteers come every week to distribute the donations. In 2018, the church served 11,000 people.

Although the congregation is small, the people care about the community and focus on helping others rather than just having Sunday worship services.

2. The Widow of Zarephath

Today's Old Testament lesson talks about people who focus on others and not on themselves. This is one of the most critical periods in the history of Israel.

Elijah is one of the most well-known prophets of the Old Testament. Elijah appears during the reign of king Ahab. Ahab was the seventh king of the Northern Kingdom Israel. Ahab worshipped Baal because he believed that Baal was the god who brought the rains and bountiful harvests. Elijah stands before Ahab and prophesies a great famine that would last for several years until Elijah announces its end. According to Luke 4:25, the drought continued for three and a half years. During this time of drought God's mighty power reveals one miraculous event after another through Elijah.

During the period of the drought, Elijah is directed by the Lord to go to Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. There Elijah would be fed by ravens and drink from the brook (1 Kings 17:6). When Elijah's brook dries up God gives him another instruction. God sends him outside Israel's territory to the Phoenician town of Zarephath. Zarephath was on the Mediterranean coast between Sidon and Tyre. Jezebel, the wife of king Ahab was a Sidonian. God sends Elijah to the very place from which she came and protects him from king Ahab.

Elijah's second hiding place is the house of an unnamed widow (1 Kings 17:8-9). Elijah requests the widow to bring him a little water (1 Kings 17:10-11). When she is willing to bring him a drink of water, he asks her for some bread as well. 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****" (verse 12).* Elijah discovers that the widow is so short on food that she is preparing for a final meal for herself and her son.

Elijah assures her that she could afford to offer him hospitality. Elijah had a promise from God. He says to her, *"**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 sends rain on the earth**"* (verse 14). The widow trusts Elijah and gives all she has to him. What happens to her when she brings her final meal to Elijah? Verse 16 says, "***The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail***." The non-Israelite woman experiences the on-going God's miraculous provision when she shows an act of faith in the Lord. Elijah makes it clear in the episode that all resources belong to God.

That is not the end of the story. The famine was a terrible experience to the widow, but the worst was yet to come.

3. Her Son is Revived

Sometime later, the widow's son becomes sick to the point of death. The widow concludes that the presence of Elijah in her house has called God's attention to her sin, and that the death of her son is a divine punishment for her sin (verse 18). Elijah asks her for her son and stretches himself out on the body of the boy and prays for his restoration. 1 Kings 17:22 says, "***The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived***." The non-Israelite widow is granted the supreme blessing of God, the gift of her son's life. Her son is the only hope for her. The restoration of her son is the best gift from the Lord. This is the first instance of raising the dead in the Bible. 1 Kings 17:17-24 tells us that Elijah's God is in charge of not only the necessities for everyday life but also life and death.

4. A Widow's Son in Nain is Raised

In today's New Testament lesson Luke 7:11-17, there is another episode of a widow and her son in a town called Nain. The woman has lost her husband and now her son who was her only hope has died. The widow is probably past the age of childbearing and would not marry again. As Jesus and his disciples approach the town gate, a large crowd from the town is carrying out the body of the dead boy. When Jesus sees the widow, he says, "don't cry." Then Jesus approaches the coffin and touches it. He says, "***young man, I say to you, rise***." The dead man sits up and begins to talk.

Jesus gives the young man back to his mother. As God raised the son of the widow in Zarephath through Elijah, God raises the son of the widow in Nain through Jesus. Luke's gospel does not say anything about the life of the widow after her son is raised from the dead. But Luke 7:17 says, "***this word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country***." I am sure that the widow lived her life sharing her experience of her son who was raised from the dead with others. She has a clear purpose in life.

5. The Celebration of the Life of a Godly Man

The purpose of my visit to Kansas City was to join in the celebration of my colleague and mentor, George Moore's 90th birthday. The birthday was held at Harrisonville United Methodist Church in Harrisonville, MO. About 200 people came to share the joy of George's life and ministry. One of the people said that George is the godliest man that he has ever met on earth. I've mentioned it in my previous sermon, but George is a man that has shown the steadfast love of Jesus to our family for the past 30 years. Even after many years, George's love and care remains the same.

George's life can be described by one sentence: he has a clear purpose in life. There are many people who have lived longer than George, but George remains a constant example of how we are called to live our lives as followers of Jesus. He teaches me and many people what it means to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

George retired in 1994. Since his retirement, for the past 25 years he has been serving God's people. At 90, George still visits those in the hospital, often driving an hour to see them. George takes care of himself very well to continue to do God's business. Let me tell you how well disciplined he is. I do not wake up at 4:30 in the morning when I am home. But while I stayed at his house last week, I woke up at 4:30 am to go to the community center to walk with him for about 2 miles. He walks five days a week. I learned from George that he takes care of himself to live his life for the Lord and others.

6. Conclusion

Today's scripture passages tell us that our lives are full of many ups and downs in our life's journeys. We can feel that we are just surviving or that there are times when all hope disappears. And yet, even in our worst times, we can often see our neighbors who need our help. Today's passages remind us that when we share what we have with others, we would experience God's miracles in our lives and in the lives of the people that God puts in front of us. When the widow in Zarephath gave her last meal to Elijah in faith, God would provide a miracle. In the end, God provides for everything that she needs.

7. Application

From tomorrow until Friday, we will have our 2019 Vacation Bible School. I've heard about 25 children have registered. VBS is one of the most exciting ministries for me. I am so grateful to Pat Frost, Ann Burnham, and those who have prepared for this event and will participate in teaching. I want to thank those who brought materials for the VBS. If you can make a financial contribution to 2019 VBS, we would appreciate it.

Like some of us, I am a product of VBS. I went to church for the first time when I was about six years old in Korea. A friend of mine invited me to his church's VBS. I still remember a teacher who taught me about the stories in the Old Testament. He was full of excitement and enthusiasm. The VBS made a big impact on my life. I am sure our VBS in the past years made a big difference in the lives of the children.

When we give of our time, our talents, and our lives for God's purposes, God would return to us more than we could ever ask or imagine. Let us not forget that God has given us his abundant love through the sacrifice of Jesus

on the cross and that God still cares for us every day. Are we willing to give what we have so that one more person might meet Jesus? Amen.