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Pentecost 27B
Peace, Seattle
November 8, 2015
1 Kings 17:8-16, Mark 12:41-44

MORE THAN ENOUGH

She was at the end of her rope with no safety net to catch her.

- No social security.
- No survivor benefits from her husband's pension plan.
- No male relatives to come to her aid.

All she has left is a handful of flour and a spot of oil…the knot at the end of her rope.
As she bends to gather sticks for a fire she knows will be her last, along comes a stranger.

First he asks her for a drink. But after three years without rain, finding an extra cup of water isn't as easy, for this woman of Zarephath, as we might think. Yet, hospitality is so deeply ingrained in her that, in spite of her own need, she puts down her sticks to find him a drink.

And while she goes he calls after her, adding his bid for a bite of bread—as if that would be the easiest thing in the world for her to fulfill!

She tells him everything then. Not because she's looking for sympathy but simply because it's the truth: The flour and oil she has are all that separate her and her son from death.

She wants the man to know what he is asking. But you know what?
Her story doesn't faze him one bit!

On the contrary, after hearing what she says, he tells her to go ahead and make the bread; to serve him first, then herself and her son.

Here she is, about to slip off that knot at the very end of her rope, and Elijah says, LET GO.

There are two miracles in this story. The most obvious one is that the jar of meal and the jug of oil do not run out. True to his word, God remains faithful, and in the face of scarcity, God's promise that there will be enough holds true.

Less obvious, but just as important, is another miracle:
That this poor mother, when she hears God's word of promise spoken, is able to take in that promise and trust that what Elijah says will indeed come to pass.

We come face to face with two widows today living in poverty. Yet, even though they live their lives in the margins, they are still able to respond to the invitation of God to give of themselves.

They have every right to say NO. But instead their response to life is to trust God with the outcome.

These are challenging stories for us who have so much. And they raise the question:
What is the basic paradigm, the primary lens, through which we live our lives?
Is it a paradigm of scarcity? Or a paradigm of abundance?

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In her book, Kitchen Table Wisdom[1], Rachel Naomi Remen speaks of growing up with a father who, whenever anything went wrong for the family, would shake his head and say,
AH! THE LUCK OF THE REMENS!

"For many years," she writes, "I believed that we were indeed unlucky people."

In 1971 her father won a prize in the New York State lottery. Not a huge amount of money by lottery standards, but more money that her dad had ever seen in his life in one place.
IT WAS A WINDFALL FOR HIM, AND IT WAS A WINDFALL FOR ME, TOO, she writes.
NOT BECAUSE OF THE MONEY BUT BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED NEXT.

Her father was in the hospital recovering from surgery when he discovered he had the winning ticket. He taped the ticket to his chest, convinced that no one could be trusted to redeem it, not any of the family or any of his friends, not even his wife.

For a long time he could not be persuaded to turn the ticket in. As the deadline for redemption drew near, he finally redeemed the ticket himself, but he never spent the money because he was afraid that others would then know he had it.

> GRADUALLY, Remen writes, A FAMILIAR ANXIETY SETTLED AROUND US.
> AND THEN I GOT MY WINDFALL. I SAW THAT THE LUCK OF THE REMENS WAS HOMEMADE.
> THERE WAS NO WAY THAT MY FATHER COULD BE LUCKY IN THIS WORLD.
> HE COULD EVEN TURN WINNING $50,000 INTO A MISFORTUNE, A SOURCE OF GRIEF, ANXIETY, AND STRESS.

If the primary lens through which we look at the world is scarcity and mistrust, is it any wonder that dire predictions become self-fulfilling prophecies?

Friends, we know better. This is an incredibly generous community, with a spirit of giving at its core! **The God we have come to know in Jesus doesn't ration out love, but hurls it out exuberantly, extravagantly, lavishly! And because this is true, we in turn are free to share generously with others.**

When we live with the same generous spirit as Jesus lived, his love flows <u>through</u> us and we become agents of God's transforming work within and beyond this place.

When a woman named Tonya knocked on the door here a week ago, I thought at first I might have to send her away empty-handed. The balance in the Agape Fund was less than a dollar; all the grocery gift cards had been given away; and the food offerings we'd collected had already been delivered.

Tonya and her four children had no place to live. But with the help of others she'd managed to scrape enough money together to buy a used van—something they could use for getting around and, for the time being, <u>as their home.</u>

WHAT WE REALLY NEED, she told me as we stood in the narthex, IS SOME BLANKETS.

Of course. You can't stay warm in a car at night without blankets this time of year. My eyes went to the sanctuary. The week before these pews had been draped with quilts, but they were all gone now; sent on to serve others in need.

[1] Rachel Naomi Remen. *Kitchen Table Wisdom* (New York: Penguin, 2006) http://www.rachelremen.com/books/kitchen-table-wisdom/

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But there were some prayer shawls waiting, still unclaimed—and several especially large ones that would ward off the cold. Tonya accepted them eagerly. WE LIKE TO PRAY WITH THE FOLKS WHO RECEIVE THESE SHAWLS, I said. MAY I PRAY WITH YOU? And so we did.

When we offer ourselves—whether through the knitting of prayer shawls, the piecing of quilts, through food bank gifts or digging rain garden or building seal rafts, or through regular generous monetary offerings which undergird the mission we share—the Spirit sets in motion a ripple effect that stretches out to touch people and places and lives far beyond our congregation.

Giving is one of the things we do best here, and it's a central feature of our Spirit of Community that defines our congregation. And we accept the challenge because, the truth is, we can never out give God!

In lean times and in flush times, God enters our lives with an invitation to trust him first, and to live and give generously.

When we live with that spirit, God's love flows through us and through the leaven of generosity the world becomes a different place.

Let us pray: Gracious Lord, thank you for the abundant love you pour out on us in Jesus. Thank you for the gift and calling to be generous stewards of all that you have given us. Help us to trust you in all things, and to live our lives with the conviction that you will multiply what we give beyond what we can imagine. May we, in every circumstance of life, trust that you are always with us, and in that trusting, prosper the spirit of community; the spirit of giving. Amen.