

June 9, 2013 “Unfailing Treasure” 1 Kings 17:8-16 Luke 12:22-34

It's not unusual, here in Winsted, for our church to receive calls asking us for money to help with rents and deposits and utility payments. Sometimes we can help, other times we try to give \$50 for part of the need, and sometimes we cannot help, because the person has already been helped and we just don't have enough for every need. It's the same with our food pantry. One of our members will bring in bags of groceries filled with \$100 worth of items, but then eleven people come through that week and the shelves are just about empty by Saturday. There's just not enough to meet everybody's needs.

Whether you have a paycheck or a check from the government, you know how tight things can get by the end of the month, where there's just not enough to provide what is needed.

And there are other kinds of scarcity: Anybody who's been reading newspapers or watching news reports has had pounded into him/her the fear that nothing is sufficient for us to have a sense that everything's okay in life these days.

We see more and more violence throughout the Middle East and lots of other places around our globe. Instead of learning to love each other, new generations get angrier and angrier, and there is a shortage of peace.

We hear of shootings and fatal accidents near and far daily, events reflecting not enough love, not enough police patrols, not enough sense, not enough care in driving....

Not long ago a doctor wrote about how current medicare payments are not nearly enough to cover a physician's costs...Nursing homes and hospitals say they're hurting, and anybody who has needed their services has learned that there's never enough money to cover medical bills.

Even though we live in one of the wealthiest states in one of the world's wealthiest nations, America, we know people who are really hurting, for a lot of different reasons. Life in our world is full of insufficiency!

So when we hear a story about a poor widow preparing to make one last meal for her son and herself, we can understand pretty easily that she didn't have enough to live. In those days, there was no welfare office, and there were no food banks or shelters. She was at the end of her options.

One man told his pastor, after hearing the story we heard today from 1 Kings and also the story of Jesus seeing a poor widow put everything she had into the offering plate of the synagogue (Luke 21:1-4), “Those stories in the Bible of the widows trusting God or giving everything in spite of hard circumstances are fine for people who are comfortable, but I'm not comfortable... I cannot put this week's paycheck in the offering plate; it barely keeps us from losing our house as it is. When I hear of the trust those widows had, I feel empty and sort of angry. God's not going to pay my mortgage or put braces on my kid's teeth.” (Pause)

We may feel the same... But the Gospel lesson we heard today would challenge us if we do. Jesus said, "Don't worry about tomorrow, what you shall eat or wear... God knows all about your needs. Trust in God, and all those other things will fall into place." God is sufficient, if we will trust God.

In a world where there seems not enough of anything but trouble, Jesus invites us to learn that *God is enough....*

C.S. Lewis commented on Jesus' counsel to trust God like the lilies and the birds trust God, with these words: "I suppose living from day to day ('take no thought of the morrow') is precisely what we have to learn - though the Old Adam in me sometimes murmurs that if God wanted me to live like the lilies of the field, I wonder why He didn't give me the same lack of nerves and imagination as they enjoy! Or is that just the point, the precise purpose of this Divine paradox and audacity called Man - that we must do with a mind what other organisms do without it?" (C.S. Lewis in a letter to Mary Willis Shelburne 30 Oct 1958 - found on Internet - altered by fte)

A few days ago, our dog, Daisy, a Rat Terrier, heard an approaching thunderstorm. I could not hear it yet, but I could tell by the way she started panting and pawing at me and whining and trying to hide under my chair that a storm was coming. I gave her a dose of the medication prescribed by our vet to help get her through storms, but it did not help. In my lap, she was butting into my head and breathing horrible breath of anxiety right into my face; she was terrified. I tried to tell her that yes, a storm was coming, but that I would watch over her and take care of her, but she could not grasp it. I assured her that she was safe in my arms and that we were in a strong house, but she only got worse. Her ridiculous fears really got to me; panting and panicking don't help anything. But then I realized that I'm not so different when it comes to life...panicking and worrying so often. I wondered if God was asking me to receive another touchable, breathable illustration, for we who have been assured that God loves us and will take care of us really seem just as able to be as anxious and scared of life as Daisy is scared of storms.

Storms come in all shapes and sizes. "I may not have enough. The world's too scary. I may flunk the test. I may get sick and die. My factory may shut down. I may get laid off." We shiver and shake and ignore God's promise of sufficiency. "Be still and know that I am God...a very present help in time of trouble." (Psalm 46)

Not a one of us knows how many more months or years we'll live. We don't know if we'll have a financial windfall or end up losing whatever money we do have. We have no idea as to whether or not we'll be called upon to do something really difficult or impressive. We don't know what the next visit to our doctor will tell us. We have no idea how much time we will have with somebody we love. We don't know what lies ahead. ... Each of us does know the troubles we face today, and the difficulty we have trusting ourselves and God. We know how we often end up being less faithful and less loving than we might have hoped... I remember hearing Tony Campolo telling his audience, in essence: "You're going to die! Get over it, and see what you can do while you're alive!"

Henri Nouwen was a priest/scholar who struggled mightily with his own life as a Christian. He taught at Yale and elsewhere, spent time in Guatemala, and finally worked in a home for mentally handicapped persons in Canada. A few years before he died, he wrote about the freedom he discovered to really live: "Even though I often give in to my fears and warnings, I still deeply believe that our few years on this earth are part of a much larger event that stretches out far beyond the boundaries of our birth and death. I think of it as a mission into time, a mission that is exhilarating and exciting mostly because the One who sent me on this mission is waiting for me to come home to tell the story of what I have learned.

"Am I afraid to die? I am every time I let myself be seduced by the noisy voices of my world telling me that my 'little life' is all that I have and advising me to cling to it with all my might. But when I let those voices move to the background and listen to that still small voice calling me Beloved, I know that there is nothing to fear. I know that dying is the greatest act of love--the act that leads me into the eternal embrace of my God whose love is everlasting." (*Life of the Beloved*, 1992)

The widow shared her last bit of food with Elijah, and learned that God could provide for her... God was sufficient.

We have been given life, each of us. Some of us will live long lives, some will not be as long. All of us have gifts, and each of us - every day - has the choice of whether or not to trust God.

As a devotion, I've been reading from a book entitled, "Jesus Calling," by Sarah Young, each morning. The one for June 7, day before yesterday, spoke to me deeply, so I will share it with you now. This is written as if Jesus is speaking to us: "I am all around you, like a cocoon of Light. My Presence with you is a promise, independent of your awareness of Me. Many things can block this awareness, but the major culprit is worry. My children tend to accept worry as an inescapable fact of life. However, worry is a form of unbelief; it is anathema to Me.

"Who is in charge of your life? If it is you, then you have good reason to worry. But if it is I, then worry is both unnecessary and counterproductive. When you start to feel anxious about something, relinquish the situation to Me. Back off a bit, redirecting your focus to Me. I will either take care of the problem Myself or show you how to handle it. In this world you will have problems, but you need not lose sight of Me." (*Jesus Calling*, p. 166)

When this sermon is over, we will sing the song, "I Was There to Hear Your Boring Cry," which is in the special book of hymns, *The Faith We Sing*. This song moves along as though it is being sung to each of us by God, and it tells us that God was there with us the day we were born and that God has been and will be with us through every stage of our lives, and beyond. I hope that you will sing it and receive it as assurance that God loves you and is with you every nano-second of your life.

We are all asked to trust and serve the Lord. The fact that we are *here* means that God has called us to be Christians, followers of Jesus. In Jesus Christ, we have met the God who gives

his very life to us. God continues to give us this gift of life, so that we can become the kind of people who dare to give our lives for others. God invites us to trust that God's love and care are sufficient for us, that the jar will not run empty, that God is our help and hope in every kind of trouble, and that we can have the abundant life Jesus Christ came to give us. May we discover, again and again, that God is sufficient for all our needs. Thanks and praise be to God! Amen.

Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen.