

Come, Lord Jesus – make these words to be for us Your word of life. Amen.

Someone once told me about two towns. In one, folks live like there's never enough, like they better save and only give out a little bit here and there – We might say they're living in Scare-City.

They're always scared of running out. They hold on to what they have, because they worry a lot about what they don't have. The future is a place of potential deprivation that must always be guarded against.

In the other town, people expect that there's going to be enough and more, that things will work out fine, and they usually do, and when they don't they roll with it – they expect gifts and are open to them. These people usually experience life as a richer thing than do the folks in Scare-City. The residents of this town are so full of joy, you can often find them dancing – in fact, they're doing A Bun Dance.

Okay, so that's what we call a groaner – but these two widows remind me of it. The widow of Zarapheth is a longtime resident of Scare-City – with good reason.

She's been enduring a drought, and is the sole source of support for her son. Now she's at the end of her supplies – she wants to use it all up on one last cake before she and her son die of starvation.

And this prophet comes along asking for her last bit of flour and oil.

"Give it all – and see what God does."

So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

*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.*

Now this prophet, Elijah, has been on the run from evil Queen Jezebel, and has had to get used to God feeding him – through ravens, miracles, all kinds of ways.

He has experienced provision. He has given it all and God keeps coming through.

He always has enough – not too much left over, but enough.

God's abundance is sometimes just enough.

Maybe we stay closer to God when we have just enough.

We don't know much about the widow of Jerusalem – except we can bet she has every much reason to live in ScareCity as does the other widow.

Widows in biblical times had no legal protections.

When your husband was gone, that was it – you couldn't own land or a business.

Either someone else came along and married you, or you lived on handouts.

And yet, here is this widow putting her tithe into the treasury –

two coins, much less in total than what the wealthy were putting in.

But percentage wise? Much more. Jesus says it was 100 percent of what she had.

These well-off folks are making a big show of giving their 10 percent –

and here comes this poor widow, giving it all. All she has. Trusting enough.

Here she is doing a Bun Dance right there in the temple –

right in the heart of Scare-City.

Why would she give so much, all she had? Because she had nothing to lose?

Having nothing to lose can make it easier for us to trust in God.

That's why Jesus said it was difficult for the wealthy to enter into the life of God –

they have so, so much to lose – why trust in what you can't see,

when you can trust in your bank account and stock portfolio. It takes a lot of spiritual maturity to enjoy those gifts without putting our faith in them.

I think she put it all in because she trusted in God to provide.

Radical trust is what we're called to. Radical trust leads to joy.

When I don't hoard and save and worry; when I expect abundance,

that's what I receive. And when I expect scarcity, Scare-City is where I end up.

God loves us either way. God provides either way – but we miss out on joy.

We should be doing A Bun Dance every Sunday at Christ Church – we are blessed.

We don't have a lot of extra, but we have enough, so we are in a position to ask

where God is inviting us to have a bigger impact.

I asked the Vestry to name some things we could do if money were no object.

Outreach to harried parents? Community center? Affordable housing initiative?

More comprehensive outreach to homeless families in our region, and to folks

living in the woods. We're putting on bandaids at the moment –

what if we built some relationships, brought in other community partners, started to get folks re-housed? We are invited to think big.

This is our season for thinking about what each of us estimates we will give to

move God's mission forward at Christ Church in 2022 – we should think big too.

I hope each of us has been praying about it and will submit a percentage

number online or bring back that card by next Sunday, so we can celebrate it.

Let's not do it from a place of duty, which happens if we base our giving on our expenses; that's what the wealthy folks in the temple were doing, paying dues. Let's do it from a place of freedom and expectation. When we base our giving on a percentage of our income, we begin to move into freedom. Income goes down, so does our giving. Income goes up, so does giving. And let's do it not from a place of need – “We need to heat the building, we need to pay the priest...” but from a place of abundance and excitement: “Look at where God has placed this church, and the resources and people we have. I want to be a part of that!”

Before that day, that widow in Zaraheth was always so afraid of running out. Maybe she was like many of us – willing to do something for God, but first she was going to take care of herself and her son. And what Elijah told her was to reverse it: Give to God's people first, and then look and see what comes your way. “Be a part of God's life, not the other way around.” But as she took that chance and trusted God, she was set free. Jesus taught that's how it works in the Kingdom of God. You don't see it before you give it away – only as you give it away does it become clear.

Trust isn't only about our money – but our money does show where our hearts are. When we hold it tight, we experience tightness. When we loose our grip, we are free to receive all kinds of gifts. The more we give, the more room we have for receiving. When we give of what we have, it releases space for God to move in bigger ways.

God doesn't want a part of our life. God wants all of our life. God says, “Trust me. Lay it all down, and let me feed you.” That's what it means to be a saint – to learn to trust God with our whole life, To let God gently make us who we are truly intended to be. To let God set us free. Today, Andrew becomes a saint along with the rest of us – and as Jennifer and Kelly and this church bring him up to know God and to love God, he will grow in freedom and in trust.

God wants to feed us on the food that never runs out.
God wants to heal the nations through our gifts.
God is giving us what we need. Trust her!

Amen.

READINGS:

1 Kings 17:8-16

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah:

"Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."

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?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." "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." 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.**

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." 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. 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.

Mark 12:38-44

As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, **this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.** They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything— all she had to live on."