

Twenty-Fifth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/B): “*Dayenu*: God’s Blessings, More than Enough”
1 Kings 17:8-16; Mark 12:38-44
November 9-10, 2024
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

I got back from my early morning walk on Thursday and my tee shirt smelled like smoke. The drought we’re experiencing is providing plenty of dry fuel for the wildfires that are now burning in 8 counties of our Garden State, often fanned by gusty winds. 3 counties in the Pinelands are in the category of “extreme drought,” a rare occurrence in NJ. Reservoirs are shrinking, and wildlife is suffering.

Our first lesson this weekend reminds us that drought is nothing new. The prophet Elijah lived in the 9th century B.C., 800-years-plus before Jesus was born. In the story we hear today, Israel is suffering a drought that has caused dried-up river beds, crop failure and famine. Surprisingly (or not) the Lord sends Elijah to Gentile territory, to pagan land, to find food. And God directs him to not **just** a pagan, but a pagan **woman**, a **poor** pagan **widow**, who is asked to share the little, the last, that she and her son have. Weren’t there any rich Jewish men in Israel with **more** than enough to eat, to whom God **could** have sent Elijah? ***** But that’s not God’s way, is it?

It’s interesting that when God tells Elijah to go to Zarephath (on the other side of the tracks, so to speak), God explains, “... *for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.*” (1 Kings 17:9b) Maybe that call was dropped, because when Elijah approaches the widow, she certainly doesn’t say, “Right, no problem, I’ve been expecting you.” She probably looks at him like he’s crazy, and then explains the reason she’s scrabbling around in the dirt for a little firewood is that she’s on the verge of making a “last supper” for herself and her child, a mini-loaf the size of a dinner roll that

will be the final food to pass their lips before they die of starvation. “And you want me to **share??**”
But that’s God’s way, isn’t it?

Elijah certainly comes across to her as tone deaf and clueless when he answers:

13-14 ...“Don’t worry about a thing. Go ahead and do what you’ve said. But first make a small biscuit for me and bring it back here. Then go ahead and make a meal from what’s left for you and your son.” (1 Kings 17:13, The Message)

I would have been thinking, “What’s **left?? Nothing** will be left!” But then Elijah continues:

14 “This is the word of the GOD of Israel: “The jar of flour will not run out and the bottle of oil will not become empty before GOD sends rain on the land and ends this drought.”” (1 Kings 17:14, The Message)

The widow obeys, God comes through, and miraculously she, her son, and Elijah eat their fill for many days. ‘Hard to miss the miracle in **this** story!

I’m quite sure I miss plenty of everyday miracles, though. We’re all pretty good at giving non-spiritual, less-than-divine reasons for good things happening, aren’t we?

There’s a miracle that happens in today’s Gospel, too, but it’s subtler and would go unnoticed except for Jesus shining a spotlight on it. Once again, a widow is front and center. It’s a safe assumption that a 1st century widow, Jewish or otherwise, would be impoverished. This is why both Hebrew and Christian Scripture are full of commands to care for widows and orphans, as well as caring for foreigners in our midst, like the widow of Zarephath, because without the help of neighbors they wouldn’t survive. It’s also because God frequently, even **usually**, answers prayers for material assistance through earth angels, human beings who have compassion, who allow themselves to be channels through which God answers heartfelt prayers. That’s God’s way, isn’t it?

The Jewish widow placing her penny in the Temple offering box obviously did **not** consult with a financial advisor before plunking in **all** of her worldly wealth. From the outside looking in,

“all” isn’t much. The word for the coin she gives literally means “thin one.” It was little better than a slug. It was 1/128th of a denarius, less than 1/100th of a single day’s wages. But it is her “everything” and it is clearly given with a faith-filled heart. We’re told nothing more about her, but I’m going on record to say that she is a grateful person. Only gratitude can engender such generosity, which can’t be gauged by the amount given but only by the sacrifice it signifies and the love that compels the giver. That’s God’s way, isn’t it?

I’d say Jesus classifies this widow’s level of generosity as miraculous. I’d say the widow of Zarephath’s generosity is miraculous, too. It’s not only that the jug of oil didn’t empty and the jar of meal didn’t fail; her **willingness** to share when she had nothing **to** share, humanly speaking, was equally miraculous. So often we’re in a **scarcity** mindset. That seems to be where we’re at, as a nation. But Scripture and our faith tell us God **always** gives us enough – enough to live and thrive, **and** enough to **share** with others—because if everything comes in and nothing goes out, we’re like the Dead Sea. With no outlet, blessings become stagnant. It’s generosity that makes our lives generative.

Dayenu is the Hebrew word for “enough.” Any of you who have been guests at a Passover seder have probably sung the traditional attitude-of-gratitude song *Dayenu*, about the Exodus from Egypt. It’s very repetitive and the kids love it. There are 15 verses, but here’s a sample:

If He had split the sea for us,
and He had not taken us through it on dry land,
it would have been enough.

If He had drowned our oppressors in it,
and He had not supplied our needs in the desert for 40 years,
it would have been enough.

If He had supplied our needs in the desert for 40 years,
and He had not fed us with manna,
it would have been enough.

So, are these passages from 1 Kings and St. Mark's Gospel about obedience to God's command, or about generosity, or about recognizing miracles, or about faith, **trust** that God will provide? Yes! All of the above!

A woman named Donna Gordon wrote a Communion meditation I came across years ago, and I'm sure is inspired by our Jewish brothers and sisters' *Dayenu*. It's a reminder that in times of drought and flood, joy and pain, victory and defeat, we are to be mindful of the miraculous bounty of God's blessings and generous in sharing them, as individuals, as a faith family, as a nation.

If God gave us only 1 day of life, it would have been generous.

If God gave us only 1 springtime or 1 fall, 1 summer or winter, it would have been generous.

If God gave us only 1 day of laughter, it would have been generous.

If God gave us only 1 beautiful meal, beautifully served in a secure home, it would have been generous.

If God gave us only 1 friend to share the journey of time, it would have been generous.

If God gave us only 1 year of married life, it would have been generous.

If God gave us only 1 child – sound in mind and body, it would have been generous.

If God gave us only 1 storm that left us unharmed, it would have been generous.

If God gave us only 1 day of a good time with friends, it would have been generous.

If God gave us only 1 talent for creating beauty, it would have been generous.

If God let us laugh only once in the face of calamity, it would have been generous.

If God gave us only 1 moment's pride in the success of those we love, it would have been generous.

But he has given us life and time, joy and sorrow,
sunshine and storms, laughter and tears,
gifts to share and days to remember.

He has given us friends and lovers,
children and parents, you and me,
and himself as well.

It is God who gives us life,
who tells us ever after to choose life,
God who is our Resurrection and our hope,
who dwells within our hearts as the Spirit of life,
the vanquisher of death
and the comforter of the faithful. Amen

After all, that's God's way, isn't it?
Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

