

What an amazing story of God's prophecy, promise and provision. If you're Elijah, that is. God promises Elijah that there will be a widow to take care of him, and so seeing the widow, Elijah doesn't worry about her lack of supplies, for he knows that God will provide. For Elijah, especially given that he is a prophet of the Lord and has already seen tremendous wonders. Sure, Elijah has his moments of doubt, but for a man in ancient Israel, it's pretty likely he can find some grub and some shelter.

The story is very different if we look at it from the widow's perspective. The widow has already known great struggles and pain. She's lost her husband and her financial security. The cupboard is bare, and her spirits are so low, she is so defeated, so without hope, that she's gathering a couple sticks to build and fire and cook one last meal before she and her son succumb to starvation. This the last thing she can do for child before she dies.

She's tired and broken and starving, she's picking up little sticks. She seems no future. This is the end of the line. Then along comes this man, Elijah, and asks for her remaining food. Doesn't he understand how close to death she is? Doesn't he understand what she's been through?

But Elijah knew what was around the bend. He could see something she could not, and Elijah promises her that God will provide, multiplying her meal and oil. And so God does, and the widow and her child are saved, being fed for many days by the grace of God.

Elijah appears to never have any doubt or concern that all would be well. He could see that God would provide, God had told him so, but God had not said the same to the widow to that point. Elijah had not experienced the loss and grief and struggle of the widow. So if her response seems less than enthusiastic, there is good reason for that. She is resigned and lost.

Praise God that God saved the widow and her child at the last possible moment. Their salvation was never in doubt for God, or even Elijah, because they could see around the bend, they could beyond the last meal cooked over a few scant sticks.

Have you ever seen the end of the road coming toward you? Have you ever reached the end of your rope? Ever you ever been down to the last few dollars, or last few days, or last chance, last hope, last prayer? Have you ever been completely demoralized.

I know I have been, both in my personal life at times and in the context of my community. I'm willing to bet some of you here today have felt demoralized at times. I am willing to bet we as a church have felt demoralized at times.

It's no secret that we have our challenges here at Trinity. The flour and oil are getting pretty darn low. Sometimes it feels like it's time to pick up some sticks and light a fire and burn it down for the insurance money. And then I'm reminded that's illegal and insurance wouldn't give us much anyway. But it's easy to feel demoralized and discouraged. What we don't know is what is around the bend. We don't know what God has in store for us.

Friends, I always try to be transparent with you. We're kinda like the widow right now, the flour and oil are very low. It's November and soon we will be asking you to prayerfully consider pledging a financial gift to the church for the coming year. A pledge is basically a promise that you'll give however much over the course of the year and what that does is tell us how to budget for the coming year.

In a church with a healthy budget, they'll look at the the total pledged amount, subtract all the bills, and put the rest into mission work sharing the gospel and building the kingdom of God. They'll enough sack some away for the future, usually investing it so that it grows.

For Trinity during this season, that process looks very different. There is nothing to save away for a rainy day. For trinity that process looks more like overing how we're going to pay the electric bill. How are we going to pay the mortgage. How are we going to continue to pay staff.

Last Sunday Davis and Marty informed me there was something wrong with the organ and I was ready to start picking up sticks.

Friends, it would be easy to just start picking up sticks, but that doesn't serve the kingdom of God. Just like the widow we may not be able see

what's around the bend, but we can trust that God will do what's right for all of us.

When I first sat down Monday with this passage I thought God was trying to teach me about surprises. As the week matched on I realized God was trying to tell me to get back to business. Be screwed, surely, but don't let the work suffer because we are worried about the future. So my message and challenge to all of us today is to stop picking up sticks, don't despair, and focus on doing what God calls us to do which is to go and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to follow God.

Do you love trinity? Then pledge what you can. I have a rule that I don't ever know what any person gives or whether they give. I only see the total number, but I know you all are generous people. I can see it in how you treat one another, in how you step up when there's a need. Trinity always finds a way to take care of needs in the congregation. Well, we got a big need right now, and that's the budget. We need funds to keep the lights on, to pay the mortgage. Lest you think we are just a black hole of money, consider that we only have about eight years left on our mortgage. In eight years that expense could completely disappear and we could be in a much better position. Your pledges make all difference. Pledge what you can.

But more important than even that, is getting back to God's mission for us. Go and make disciples. Learned people have studied this at length and do you know the number one reason people give for going to a church? They were invited. And I don't mean invite cards or flyers in the mail. I mean someone went up to Glenn and said Glenn, you wanna come to church with me? I think you'll really like it the people are really nice, the music is good, one of the pastors is kinda weird I think she escaped from the circus, but the other one is pretty cool. And maybe green says no, so you go and say hey Ed, you wanna come to church? I'll sit by you and we can grab lunch afterwards and maybe Ed says okay fine if it'll shut you up. Next thing you know Ed is coming every Sunday and guess what? Now you and Ed are inviting people to church. Maybe you both get another person in your circle to come. Now we got 4 people inviting others and next thing you know this sanctuary is full of people all united to share in God's mission. This isn't hypothetical, this is real. Let me tell you a story.

One of my best friends has been in my life since I was 19. She was not a believer. She knew I was she was there all through bible college and most

of seminary. I talked to her about God. I wasn't pushy by I also wasn't shy. I invited her to church a couple of times and I think it was the third time she went with me to the Florida version of Crossroads Church. She not only became a member and gave her life to Christ, she makes me look like a back-slidden heathen now. This is real.

Stop picking up sticks. God never calls us to despair. Sometimes God does call us to endings or transformations. Remember nothing we build lasts forever except for those old Nokia cell phones. But God didn't call the widow to despair, God called her to the great work and God gave her enough to get it done and all the world was blessed for it. Stop picking up sticks, and let's get to work. You love God and Trinity, let's keep the lights on, let's pay off the mortgage. You love God and Trinity, let's go and make disciples. We usually number in the forties on the average Sunday. Imagine if everyone of you focused on bringing one person to church, let's say forty people. Even if only about a forth of them actually came and stayed, that'd be ten new people. Ten new disciples for christ, ten new people to share in our joys and concerns, to love and build God's kingdom with. And if we're focused on doing what God has called us to do, God will take care of the rest.

Put down your sticks, dust yourself off, get back to work, and trust in the God that can see around the bend.

Amen.

Rev. Kate Mauch
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