

**Sunday, November 11, 2018 – Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**A God of Abundance**

1 Kings 17: 8-16; Mark 12: 38-44

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Story Applied Structure

Adapted from CPR

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

I need some help from all of you this morning. I want you to take a moment and think about things that you would never want to be empty. I mean, if you had your way, what would be perpetually full? Take a minute to think... ok, what'd you come up with? (*Accept responses from the congregation.*)

That's all good stuff, things like coffee, your gas tank, bank account, energy. Wouldn't it be great if these things never ran out! If only, right? Has that ever actually happened to anyone, for real, and not just because you get free refills with your meal? Truth is, it never happens. Our everyday experience tells us time and again that eventually things run out, dry up, go empty. Eventually what we have is gone. What we live with day in and day out is this cold reality that there never seems to be enough.

Our Old Testament lesson from 1 Kings proves this true. Right before our text at the end of chapter 16, Ahab becomes king and marries Jezebel. Together they do evil in the eyes of the Lord by leading the people to worship other gods. The prophet Elijah pronounces God's judgment on Ahab and on the land by predicting a drought. King Ahab doesn't like the message and goes on to prove true the old axiom "Kill the messenger," so God directs Elijah to go into hiding for his own safety, where God miraculously meets his every need.

Now God sends Elijah to a widow in Zarephath, whom God has instructed to feed him, and that brings us to today's text. Obediently, Elijah does as he is instructed. So he asks for a drink and a piece of bread to eat. But there's one big problem here – this poor lady is really poor. She's out collecting sticks, a sad little kindling to build a fire to cook the last bit of flour and the last bit of oil for the last bit of food that she and her son will have. The situation is quite

grave – pun intended. Here in this land of scarcity, where brooks run dry and the land is in famine, where there’s no such thing as food stamps or soup kitchens or social welfare, and where she has no money to buy food if it were even available, she gives Elijah a dramatic response. She is ready to prepare a final meal for herself and her son “that we may eat it and die.” You can understand her reluctance, can’t you? We’d probably all do the same thing – it’s the logical thing to do.

There’s another widow before us in our Gospel. Our same logic makes that a hard story to understand. Can you see this poor widow? Before social security, before Medicare or Medicaid, before women could own property or earn money like men, widows are among the most vulnerable – unless a family member takes her in – a son, a brother, a nephew, an in-law – she’s penniless. She’s virtually invisible—nothing more than a speed bump to avoid as the rich go about their daily lives. She pulls out two copper coins and with no fanfare, no pat on the back, drops them into the treasury. It’s the smallest drop in an ocean! Again, our logic kicks in. Why would she do it? What’s she thinking? If that’s all you have, why give it away? Our conclusion: it’s utter foolishness! If your last dinner is on the way, don’t give it away. If you’re down to your last penny, don’t give it away. That’s how we think. We’ll even justify it in our minds saying, “Certainly God understands the nature of scarcity.” Yes, he does. The problem isn’t with him; it’s with us.

Scarcity prompts preservation and protection. Fear gets triggered in our brains – when money gets tight, we want to hold back from generosity. When we’re lonely and lacking for relationships, we’ll cling maybe too tightly to what we have or try to force others to be where we want them to be, rather than let them go where they’re going. Businesses will cut to the bone, ask more of their employees, defer maintenance, stop investing in their product, or marketing, or in providing value for their customers and clients. Churches can get off-course, so focused on debt management or spending or giving that they stray off course and forget about the mission. That’s what logic tells us to do when scarcity rules the day. Sure, we’re happy to feed the poor

when cupboards are full, happy to give when time is abundant, happy to tithe when the bank account is overflowing. When it gets down to it, we tend to trust in our abundance.

The problem is, abundance doesn't resolve the problem for what at its core is a spiritual issue. Remember, the Gospel text from a few weeks ago, from Mark 10? We heard the story of Jesus and a rich young man. He asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus rattles off the commandments about loving your neighbor – don't kill, don't commit adultery, don't steal, etc, etc... and when he says, "Check, check check," Jesus says you lack one thing – go sell everything and give it to the poor. The man goes away sad because his heart and trust were in his abundance. Our logic is a gift from God, but sometimes the way we depend on logic gets in the way of what God is trying to teach us.

The lessons of these two widows show us: God uses scarcity as a doorway to trust. Trust in God and his provision is the only way either of these stories makes sense. For the famished widow with Elijah, a widow obeys the crazy word Elijah gives her from God and they all eat for days, a miracle not very different than Jesus feeding the 5,000 with five fish and two loaves of bread. We don't know what happens to the lady with her two copper coins, but the point is clear: when we trust God to provide, there is always enough.

That's easier said than done of course, because often this means a change in our perspective on what "enough" means, but it really should be no surprise, because God has been using scarcity to lead his people to trust for a long time. This is the same God who provided manna in the desert, water from a rock, served thousands from five loaves and two fish, turned water into absolutely ridiculous quantities of wine, enough to provide for a hundred weddings. In Jesus we find the God of more than enough.

Jesus does more than enough to pay the full price of our sin and fill us with peace. This is what God adopted you into when you were baptized – the family of more than enough. He joined you to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. You are credited with Jesus' perfect record, empowered with his grace, crowned with his glory, and loved with a never-ending love. So

perhaps the next time you find yourself hurt, wondering if you have enough to forgive, remember that with Christ there is always enough. Or perhaps you're down to the last dollar in your wallet and you happen across that person in need of a helping hand and you're wondering if you can afford to give – with Jesus there is always enough. As God's redeemed children, we don't need to fear scarcity because our Father is a God of rich abundance. We can be sure, no matter the circumstances, there is always enough with Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.