

The year was 2008. Like many families in America my family was feeling the full force of the economic crash. We went from a beautiful house with a couple of acres of land to a small rental property. Both of my parents had lost jobs they had held for at least a decade or more. Their son, who was about to graduate from grade school had been expressing a desire to go to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, which required tuition payments. Or how about this one, the year was 2018. A not as young man after 6 years away from college had decided that it was time to go back to school. A school that was 11 hours away from home and required a good amount of financial commitment. He laid awake that night looking at his phone to see that his bank account could be measured in two figures.

Whenever the conversation of money or material possessions come up in our circles, we often get cagey. I am sure that many of us can point to times in our lives when we seemed to have more than enough likewise many of us can relate to those who suffered during the housing market crash of 2008 and say there have been times when we had absolutely nothing. In all our moments of wealth and want the LORD is still present. Our Reading for today reflects a time when there was clearly more want than wealth. Yet in spite of the circumstances that were present God's intentions remained the same. **God wanted faithfulness in the face of famine. God knows what we face** just as he knew what Elijah and the widow were facing and **God provides for us** today just as he provided for Elijah and the widow.

To understand more of what is going on in our Reading let's back the story up a little. At the end of 1 Kings chapter 16 we see a new king in Israel being crowned. Ahab was king over Israel for 22 years and as the scriptures tell us, **"Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him."** Not Exactly the glowing review a king hopes for. During his rule God raises up the prophet Elijah to address king Ahab and in the first couple of verse of chapter 17 we read that Elijah's first act is to pronounce a curse, a drought on Ahab's kingdom. As a result of this curse God sends Elijah to hide in a ravine just east of the Jordan. After providing food and water for Elijah using ravens and a small creek in the ravine, the creek dries up and the words of our reading begin.

Knowing that Elijah still needs to be provided for, God commands him to move on from the ravine and sends him to Zarephath in Sidon. When he sends Elijah on his way, he speaks words of promise to him saying that there was a widow waiting for him who would supply him with food. Throughout our interaction with Elijah so far, we have seen over and over how God is aware of what his people need. The people of Israel were under the thumb of an evil king and God knows it, so he raises up Elijah in answer to their need. Knowing that Elijah was going to experience backlash because of his curse on Ahab's reign God provides protection, food, and water. Knowing that Elijah was going to run out of water he sends him on his way to a place where he has promised food would be waiting.

However, it is not only Elijah's needs that God is aware of. He is also aware of the widow's plight. When Elijah meets the widow, he asks for a drink of water. Then acting on the promises of God he takes it a step farther and asks for something to eat. This appears to be the straw that broke the camel's back. She was willing to give the water... but food! Exasperated she tells the prophet that she only has enough for her and her son to eat one more meal then the plan was to lay down and die.

It's 2008 again, families are fighting just to put food on the table and one young man in southern Michigan is asking his family to send him to a school that is going to cost thousands of dollars. You want more LORD?! What more do I have to give? We're just trying to survive; I can't imagine giving any more than I already have. It's 2018 again, God I think I need to go back to school but I only have enough to put a tank of gas in my car. How am I supposed to travel a thousand miles away and pay tuition. God, don't you know where I am in life, can't you see I have given everything I can?

God knew exactly what Elijah needed when he sent him to the widow. He needed food and water. God knew exactly what the widow's situation was when he sent Elijah to her. God knows exactly where you are now in life and in each of these instances God provides.

Elijah speaks the words of the LORD to the widow and says, "Don't be afraid." Knowing that the woman did not have enough on her own Elijah still tells her to go and make bread first for him and then for her

and her son. Even though she had just said she only had enough for two Elijah still says that there will be enough for three. Even more than the one meal he tells her that the LORD has promised to supply her with a miracle that will last until the end of the famine. Elijah says to her, **“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.’”** God’s words of promise still come through for us today as well.

“Don’t be afraid.” God how can you say that, my bills are stacking up, my car just started blinking every warning sign it has, my wife and I can never seem to agree on anything, my body hurts from the second I wake in the morning to the minute I lay my head on the pillow at night. I have every reason and every right to be afraid. I can’t see the path forward, I can’t see the end in sight, I don’t know if I can even make it to the end of the day. These thoughts often plague us at every turn, and we think there is no way that God could possibly know or care about what we face. And yet over and over in the scripture we hear those words, “Don’t be afraid.”

God’s promises will always be greater than our personal struggles. He is always faithful to us no matter the famine that we face, he is there providing his grace. He promises that he will be with always to the very end of the age. God promises that in all things he works for the good of those who love him. If God cared about a widow in Zarephath and provided for her and her family, if God cares when a sparrow falls from the sky, if God cares enough to know the number of hairs on your head, how much more will he care about your wellbeing? God daily provides for our every need. We wake up in the morning, a blessing from God, we put on clothes every day, a blessing from God, we eat food, we drive to work, we talk with our families, we live in a country that allows us to gather each and every Sunday in worship all blessings from God.

If you think you’re daily bread that he gives you is not enough of a blessing think about this. We are all born dead to sin. From the moment we are conceived our tickets have been punched one way to death and damnation. And yet God knows, he knows that you can’t save yourself all our good works amount to nothing more than filthy rags. He knows that we are spiritually blind and deaf to the truth. So, in his great mercy he provides. Into the world is born the Savior. The Savior who provides a life that is worthy of being called perfect. The Savior who provides his own life as the only acceptable substitute for all our sins. He provides a victorious shout from a twisted and broken tree proclaiming to all that death has died, the payment has been made, it is finished.

It’s 2009 now. A young man receives a phone call from Michigan Lutheran Seminary. “Hello Connor, We’d just like to inform you that a very generous doner has provided funds for you to attend classes this fall.” It’s 2019 now. A not as young man sits in his car in the parking lot of Martin Luther College after God has provided friends, family, and a job that has enabled him to be a part of the 2019 freshmen class of young men studying to pastors. I can’t promise that as believers your life will be filled with wealth, health, and happiness. Nor does God promise that following him will result in these things. What I can promise you is that God knows. God knows what troubles your heart as you lay your head down on your pillow at night. And I can promise that God will provide. We may not see in the moment how the LORD is providing but as you look back over your life you will see time and time again how God has given you exactly what you needed. So, when the famine does come, when our bellies grumble and our wallets open up to moth balls. Remember the words of the prophet Elijah to the widow, “Don’t be afraid.” Amen.