

Message #1034
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"A HANDFUL OF FLOUR"
{I Kings 17:7-24}

Trinity Presbyterian Church
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TRUSTING GOD IN TOUGH TIMES!

Times have been tough in the Silicon Valley the past several years.

...many who became instant millionaires as venture capitalists in the mid-late 90's are now out of work

...many have seen their stock portfolios that were once very healthy looking pretty bleak

...people who were buying up property as fast as they could only three or four years ago are now selling it off as quickly as possible just to make ends meet

...I know of people who mortgaged their homes to get in on the ground floor of a "hot" company that had just gone public who are now fearful of losing that home because the "hot" company went cold

...I've heard people in our church family discussing their losses in the stock market-- some are quite substantial We hear the phrase: "Tough times NEVER last...tough people DO!" yet; let's be honest, sometimes it's tough to trust God in tough times! ...the reason many are "up a creek" these days is because they relied on the word of a trusted advisor.

...we've seen large corporations who betrayed their investors who believed their word that "all was well!"

Our text of the morning talks about...

...believing that God would provide in tough times

...exercising faith and trusting God for the impossible

...obeying when uncertain of the payback!

TOUGH TIMES FOR ELIJAH

There was a terrible drought throughout the land. It was during this time that God sent the prophet Elijah to the Kerith Brook and told him..

"Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food. So Elijah did as the Lord had told him and camped beside Kerith Brook. The ravens brought him bread and meat each morning and evening, and he drank from the brook. But after a while the brook dried up, for there was no rainfall anywhere in the land." {I Kings 17:4-6}

As I read this I was reminded of those verses in Psalm 37 that have meant so much to me...sustained me...down through the years and hold true especially during tough times-- "The Lord delights in the way of an individual whose steps He has made firm; though they stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord upholds them with His hand. I was young and now I am old; yet, I have NEVER seen the righteous forsaken for their children begging bread. They are always generous and led freely; their children will be blessed!" {Psalm 37:23-26}

We have been reading...and hearing...much about how so much of the high-tech industry has been moving to India. I even saw on the news the other evening that much of the technical support we receive for our computers is coming from people in India...a country where poverty is so extensive.

I read this week the account of an individual who had served as a missionary in that

country that is soon to become the world's largest. "While in India, I saw many, MANY, beggars; however, in talking with Indian Christians I've been told that you will NEVER find an Indian Christian begging! Why? Because even in poverty--even as they face their own tough times--God has and God always will provide what they need...and they believe--and trust--God for that."

It was the Apostle Paul who wrote to the Philippian believers: "I have learned the secret of being content in ANY and EVERY situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want {for} My God will meet ALL {our} NEEDS according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." {Philippians 4:12b-19}

GOD SUSTAINED ELIJAH DURING TOUGH TIMES

God provided water to drink...ravens to feed Elijah; yet, God was now about to provide not only for Elijah, but for a single parent and her son through an incredible miracle--an illustration of how God indeed meets ALL of our NEEDS...!

Because of this horrific drought, the brook dried up.

...the water that has sustained him was gone

...it was time for Elijah to move on

"Then the Lord said to Elijah, 'Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. There is a widow there who will feed you. I have given her My instructions!'" {17:8-9}

Notice how God provides for His own...

...in verse 4: "I have commanded {the ravens} to bring your food..."

...now in verse 9: "A widow will feed you, I have given her instructions."

Now, mind you, Zarephath was part of Sidon--controlled by a heathen king.

...it was a city where Baal was worshipped.

...it was a land that posed a threat to him and his people

...but he is told to go there.

God was going to meet Elijah's need in Satan's territory. Isn't it amazing what God can do?

And...God was going to meet his need through a destitute single parent.

TOUGH TIMES FOR THE WIDOW

"He went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, 'Would you please bring me a cup of water?' As she was going to get it, he called to her, 'Bring me a bit of bread, too!'" Now, let's pause right here and realize that a widow in those times and in that place was probably the most destitute human being.

...how strange that God would allow the brook to dry up

...even stranger that He would then send Elijah to the most utterly helpless person--the widow of Zarephath.

One wonders why Elijah didn't argue with God concerning these instructions.

Somehow when he entered the city he realized that this was the woman.

...first, he asks for a drink of water...and she responded!

...secondly, before she could return with the water he made yet another outrageous demand that would require a fantastic sacrifice--"...bring me a bit of bread, too!"

This prompted her sad response...

"I swear by the Lord your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die."

...this is poverty at it's worst...

...no food stamps to bail her out

...no SSA or SSI

...no welfare

Elijah had virtually requested from her EVERYTHING she had left in life!

God's demand on this widow is much the same the God makes of us--His people.

...God demands our all

...God asks that we trust Him to supply ALL our needs

...God requires that we trust Him completely!

...He is NEVER satisfied with anything short of our ALL

...our best!

...and to be BLESSED by God he demands OBEDIENCE.

In the words of the song written by Don Moen that we sang earlier this morning...

"God will make a way when there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see; He will make a way for me. He will be my guide, hold me closely to His side.

With love and strength for each new day; He will make a way, He will make a way!"

...but we must believe...trust...have faith...and obey! What was this widow to do?

"Elijah said to her, 'Don't be afraid! Go ahead and cook that 'last meal,' but bake me a little loaf of bread first. Afterward there will still be enough food for you and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: There will ALWAYS be plenty of flour and oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops grow again!'"

In spite of the questions that must've been racing through her mind...

...who ever heard of anything so preposterous?

...how could this be?

...who is this scruffy looking man?

...how can His God make this happen?

...this was the biggest decision in her life!

...what should she do?

...SO...

"...She did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her son continued to eat from her supply of flour and oil for MANY days. For no matter how much they used, there was ALWAYS enough left in the containers, just as the Lord has promised through Elijah!"
What would you have done?

...she exercised tremendous and amazing faith

...she obeyed

...and God blessed her and kept food in her house!

...and Jesus made mention of her in Luke's gospel

CONCLUSION

Here we are in the midst of our fall stewardship campaign. We have ministries that need underwritten as we begin a new year.

...our youth ministry under Vincent's leadership is flourishing--once again on

Tuesday and Thursday evening's we hear the voices of youth in our halls

...our ALPHA ministry is now beginning it's second year

...our SMALL GROUPS continue and new ones are being added

...our lovely rose garden is attracting neighbors to our facility

I believe that 2004 is going to be a year of growth for Trinity in a number of ways. I hear God saying to us...

"You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities!" {Matthew 25:21,23}

It's time we take serious the great commission that we all can quote but few heed.

...it's time when we take serious the all to "love our neighbors" enough to invite them to worship...

...to a youth meeting

...to an ALPHA dinner

...to a small group

It's time that we take serious the promise in God's word that He WILL supply ALL our NEEDS!

This woman could've come up with many reasons why not to respond to Elijah's demands; however, she believed him....she believed in his God...and that He would supply her needs.

Listen...

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you!" {Luke 6:38-39}

...give...and you will be blessed.

...give...from your heart as God has given and blessed you

"Each person should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly, or under compulsion, for God LOVES cheerful giver!" {II Corinthians 9:7}

I'm praying for a church full of cheerful...hilarious givers!

I'm praying for a church that believes God for the impossible!

I'm praying for a church that steps out on faith!

I'm praying for a church that is obedient to His commands.

I'm praying for a church that is so filled with blessings because God's people cannot...and will not...withhold their giving.

I'm praying for a church that stretches their giving...and trusts God to supply their needs!