

Faith Mennonite Church  
August 7, 2011  
Taste and See: God is Good  
Kathleen Remund

**Trusting in Enough**  
*1 Kings 17:8-16*

*I have nothing...only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.*

As I prepared to write this sermon a couple of nights ago, I sat in my air-conditioned dining room with a carton of frozen yogurt I'd picked up at the co-op. It was hot and humid outside. I was cooling myself off with spoonfuls of sweet, creamy, cool dessert and practicing the fine art of procrastination—a familiar and important part of my writing ritual.

As I sat there bathed in comfort, ingesting more food than my body needed, I wondered how I could possibly approach this story about a starving widow staring death in the face in the midst of a terrible drought. It was not that I thought she had nothing to teach me. I just wasn't sure that from my satiated place in the world I could get close enough to her experience to learn something real.

Starvation is a terrible, appalling thing. The thought of it cuts to the heart of our deepest vulnerabilities. Food is primal. The desperation of a young baby's cry contains the terror and helplessness that hunger creates when we feel helpless to satisfy it. When my babies were small, I felt their desperation in my own body when they were hungry. I couldn't get them to my breast fast enough to completely ward off the wave of fear that flowed from them to me.

The widow in this morning's story isn't just facing her own fierce hunger and sense of abandonment; she's facing her inability to feed her child. She's transfixed, not just by her own impending death but by the grief and horror of not being able to save her young son.

I've felt the terrible weight of that reality only once in my life, and only for a moment. I was in Mexico City in 1981, cutting across a courtyard in front of a great cathedral. There were beggars there, hands outstretched. A woman came up to me. I was young and my heart was open. I hadn't learned yet how to armor myself against the pain of a passing stranger. I looked into her eyes. What I saw there changed me forever.

I saw a real human being filled with a ferocious intelligence and a terrible anguish. With a shock of recognition, I saw myself in those desperate eyes. She was terribly thin and gaunt, and a baby just as thin as she was clung desperately to her breast. I felt, just for a moment, a flash of her outrage and despair as if it were my own. I knew deep in my guts and my solar plexus that I could have been her and she could have been me. Only an accident of birth separated us. I felt the force of her longing to live and her love for her baby. And there was nothing I could do to save her. I pressed a coin into her hand and walked on. That was more than thirty years ago, and I've carried her with me ever since.

We live in a culture that is obsessed with safety and security. Life insurance, health insurance, flood insurance, property insurance, seatbelts and bike helmets and GPS locators on our cell phones. Savings accounts and 401K plans and Social Security and 30-year mortgages.

Some of us still talk about “permanent” employment. We make long-term plans and expect to carry them out. Or—if we don’t have that sense of security—we believe we have failed.

It’s not wrong to plan for the future or make commitments or seek to be good stewards of our life and health. But it’s easy to become controlled by fear and to cover that fear over with actions that give us the illusion that we are in control of our lives. To convince ourselves that if we do the right things, no harm will come to us or to those we love. To numb ourselves against the reality that we are finite and vulnerable, and that our destinies are not in our own hands.

When Elijah meets the widow of Zarephath, she has no illusions at all about her vulnerability. She knows that she has just enough food for one more meal for herself and her son, and that’s all. She knows that death is breathing down their necks. When Elijah asks her for a piece of bread, she doesn’t even refuse him—she just tells him that she has nothing but a bit of flour and oil which is almost gone. And that she and her son are facing starvation.

At this, Elijah the prophet makes her a promise from God. He doesn’t promise her riches or overflowing storehouses. He doesn’t tell her that she will never go hungry again if she shares the last of her food with him. He doesn’t even promise her meat, or fruit. What he does promise her is *enough*—enough flour and oil to enable her and her son to survive the drought. “Do not be afraid,” Elijah says. You will have *enough*.

So here is this destitute single mother, facing the abyss, knowing that terrible suffering is lurking in the shadows nearby to swallow her and her son. Preparing for the ritual of one last meal. One last, precious experience of bodily satisfaction. For one last time, she will start the fire and prepare the bread, and she and her beloved son will share that meager, important meal together. And now, a stranger claiming to speak for God (but who knows?) is asking her to forgo this closing ritual for the sake of a stranger’s need and a thin promise of *enough*. If she will open her hands and give to a stranger her last drop of nourishment, her precious last supper—she will (perhaps?) be blessed with *enough*.

This is important, because it’s a mark of the way the God of the Bible provides. The manna that the Israelites were fed in the wilderness was given a day at a time. There was just *enough* manna for the day, and it couldn’t be hoarded or it would spoil. When Jesus fed a crowd with five loaves of bread and two fish, everyone got *enough*. There was food left over, but it was probably no more than enough for people to eat on their return home. When Jesus reminded his followers about the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, he told them not to worry about food or clothing but to trust God to provide enough for their needs. He didn’t promise them riches—he just assured them that they would have *enough*.

These miracles of care are gestures of faithfulness made in response to trust. They remind us that we can never make ourselves secure. The widow learned, like the Israelites in the wilderness, that no matter how much she might want to hoard her little bit of food for herself and her son, hoarding was not the way. The response to scarcity, it seems, is not to hold tight in fear but to open our hands and share the little that we have.

And so...she opened her hands, and let go. Let go of her last meal, let go of her last remnant of control, her last comfort, the last meager bulwark between her tiny family and the abyss. Not knowing whether to believe Elijah’s promise, she let go anyway. She gave her absolute last to a stranger.

And she and her son were blessed, in turn, with *enough*.