

## ***More Than Enough***

A Sermon for Sunday Morning Worship with Communion  
United Congregational Church, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT  
Sunday, November 3, 2019 – All Saints Sunday  
(First preached on November 11, 2012)  
Text: 1 Kings 17:8-16

I first preached this sermon during my first year here, as you can see from the date in the heading above. It begins with a story about two of the saints in my life, each of them responsible in their own way for me being here as your pastor. Here goes...

One of my earliest memories of childhood – I was probably 4 or 5 – is of my grandmother and my mother making lye soap in the basement of our home. There was an ancient rusty two burner gas stove stashed in a corner underneath the small cellar windows on which a massive old cook pot usually stood empty. One day I went down cellar to see what my mother and grandmother were up to and discovered the big pot hissing and simmering away on the old burner stove as my grandmother stirred it relentlessly, hunched over it on a rickety stool. I was used to the old pot bubbling away at the end of summer as my mother and grandmother spent hours canning stewed tomatoes, peaches and apple butter. But on this winter day, the steaming pot was not holding anything even remotely appetizing. In fact, as I cautiously peered in, I thought it looked downright disgusting.

“What’s that?” I asked, as my finger pointed at the gloppy, bubbling mess in the huge cauldron.

“Soap,” my grandmother answered in her no nonsense voice.

“Soap? Why are you cooking soap? Don’t we already have soap? Why would you cook soap? You can’t eat soap!” The shock of her answer sent me into a frenzy of confused questions. I was horrified at the thought that my grandmother had somehow decided that soap was now a food item.

“We’re not cooking soap to eat,” my mother appeared suddenly and now jumped into the conversation. “We’re making new soap from all the left over bits of the soap bars we’ve been saving.” I had always wondered why we saved all those bits of soap and I never knew where they went when my mother scooped them out of the soap trays in the bathroom. Now I knew. This made sense to me because the house I grew up in was one where you never, ever, *ever* threw anything away that might possibly be of use in some way at some point in time. Crusts and heels of bread were saved for bread pudding. Tin foil was washed, carefully dried and reused. Old socks were darned until they were two threadbare to be saved and then they became cleaning rags. And itsy bitsy pieces of bar soap were saved religiously – something I had always thought strange until I witnessed for myself this soap making event in the basement. I didn’t see the whole process so I have no idea how they did it. The resulting homemade soap was gray and ugly, just big chunks of stuff my mother used for the laundry and stubborn cleaning issues.

I thought of this story of my childhood when I pondered today's story from I Kings about Elijah and the widow of Zarephath because this story is one of scarcity and abundance. Elijah and the widow were confronted with a reality that what they had to get by on just could not possibly be enough. And yet it was. Set within the context of a drought and resulting famine which Elijah's prophesy against King Ahab had brought about, this story is one which illustrates the biblical concept that when God is involved, there is always enough. This is an often repeated theme throughout the Scriptures, recalling as it does God's provision of manna and partridges for the wandering Israelites after their escape from Egypt. So too is the New Testament story of the loaves and fishes where Jesus feeds 5000 from the two fishes and one loaf lunch of a little boy. These stories and so many others in the Bible remind us, over and over again, that while we humans worry about scarcity, about not having enough, God provides abundance more than sufficient to meet our needs.

Such is this story about Elijah and the widow. Elijah is a prophet whose job it is to return the Israelites to the worship of and devotion to Yahweh. They had been led away from the God of Israel by King Ahab to the worship of Baal, the god of his wife Jezebel. At the point where today's story begins, Elijah has prophesied to Ahab that no rain would fall again until Elijah spoke the word from God. This was to demonstrate that the God

of Israel was much more powerful than Baal, including being able to control the weather itself. And in fact no rain fell, not even enough moisture for dew on the grass existed. After making his prophesy, Elijah heads into wilderness at God's direction where he hides out in a wadi and the ravens bring him food. After a while the drought is so severe that the spring in the wadi dries up and God tells Elijah to go to Zarephath where a widow will provide him with food and something to drink. This relocation is no random choice on God's part since it places Elijah right smack dab in the center of the most fervent Baal worshippers in this ancient kingdom, but Elijah goes anyway, trusting God will do what God says.

As God promised, Elijah encounters the widow as soon as he enters Zarephath. She is gathering sticks when he approaches her and asks her to bring him something to drink. In this first exchange between the two, Elijah comes off as rather arrogant to our modern Western ears since he doesn't offer this obviously poor woman even a word of greeting. This is because as a widow she had absolutely no standing in the society in which they lived. Elijah could – and did – order her around like a servant. She isn't upset at his tone and she isn't refusing to bring him something because he's rude. She tells him she can't bring him anything because she has only enough for her son and herself to have one more meal before they die.

This is when the most remarkable part of this entire exchange between the two happens. Elijah, the prophet of doom and gloom whose entire message to Ahab was one intended to instill deep fear of God in Ahab, turns now to this woman barely scraping by on the very edges of society and says the exact opposite. He says to her quite clearly, “Do not be afraid.” Do not be afraid. Are you kidding me, she must have thought. Don’t be afraid? How can I not be afraid? I know I don’t have enough food to last another day and I know my son and I will both soon die of hunger or thirst or worse. Don’t be afraid? What else do I have to live on but fear?

But Elijah doesn’t stop with “do not be afraid.” He continues, “Go and do as you have said but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me and then go home and make something for you and your son.” Now let’s stop here and remember that Elijah goes to Zarephath and has this encounter with the widow because God tells him the widow will take care of him. But God apparently forgot to tell the widow. She greets his request with absolute disbelief. But she lets Elijah finish and here’s what he said: “For thus says the Lord the God of Israel. The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.” Here is God’s message to the widow! “God says there will be enough to see us through this” Elijah tells her. And she hears him and she

does what he asks. And that's exactly what happened. Neither the jar nor the jug was ever emptied until rain fell once more. There was enough. There was more than enough. Because God provided as God promised God would.

This story of the widow of Zarephath and her encounter with God's prophet Elijah whose very name means "My God is the Lord" outlines for us all, thousands of years later, what it means to live life each day from an attitude of hopeful abundance rather than from an attitude of fearful scarcity. This notion of do we have enough is at the core of so much of our society and yet it remains invisible to us because it is cleverly disguised in the media, in our social rhetoric and consumer driven society. The clear message of our culture is that there is no such thing as having too much and if you are not engaging in the constant pursuit of more, you are just not doing your part. How much is enough is a question our society literally throws at us at every turn. Commercials on TV and radio urge us constantly to do whatever we need to do to make sure we have enough of something, of everything. We are admonished to make sure we have enough life insurance, that we aren't overpaying for car insurance, that our car is big enough and new enough, that we have enough set aside for retirement, that we can manage better financially and keep more money in the bank if we shop at this store instead of that one, that if we patronize this bank instead of

the other we'll be better off, that if we voted for this candidate and not that one everything will be fine. Enough is never enough, our society tells us over and over again. The thing is – God says just the opposite.

God tells us, God shows us, over and over again that there will be enough, there will be more than enough, if we can only surrender our too human need to be in control and rely instead on God and God's promises to us. Now I want to stop right here and make clear that this is not some pie in the sky Pollyanna outlook that blindly assumes only good things will happen to us if we only trust in God. We know that's not true. We know bad things happen to the most faith-filled people. We know all too well that people lose their jobs and even their homes. We know that hurricanes come and smash things and lives to bits with no warning. We know that building a safe and secure life takes real work and effort on our part. No one is going to hand us anything. We know that. So what exactly does it mean to say that God provides for our needs? What does it mean to live every day believing with all of who we are and everything we have that God's love for us is real and tangible so there will be enough, there will be more than enough?

Well, it doesn't mean that bad things will never happen. They do. It means that when bad things happen, someone is there to lend a helping hand. It means that when someone needs our

help, we don't wait to respond until it's easy or convenient. It means that we use our resources to care for others as well as ourselves, trusting that God will help us figure out the dollars and cents math to make it real. It means that we have to acknowledge to God and ourselves that, no matter how much we try, how hard we work, how much we have in the bank, whatever our human hands and efforts accumulate and provide will never be enough. The simple truth is there is no real security we can gain for ourselves. Our only real security, our only real hope for the future, is God.

So what does this mean for us really? It means we need to make the effort to live each day looking for the bountiful presence of God in our lives rather than counting the ways there are to be afraid we won't have enough. It means counting your blessings instead of your shortfalls. It means turning over your worries, whatever they are, to God and trusting that God will do something. Now if you do this, will all your worries suddenly disappear? No. If you do this, will a check to make your mortgage payment suddenly flutter down from heaven? No. If you do this, in spite of all the doubts you have and the many reasons there are not to do it, will something change? You bet. You will. And once that happens, amazing things are possible.

What am I asking you to do this week as you head home and out into the world that tells you all the time that there is so much



you don't have? I am asking you to give that world and its message of never enough the cold shoulder. I am asking you to turn away from all that nonsense and turn toward God and say, "Okay God. Now what? Here I am, with all my needs and wants and fears stripped bare. Now what?" I promise if you do, and you listen intently and deeply for that still small voice of God our culture tries to drown out, you will hear God say – "Don't be afraid. There will be enough, there will be more than enough." The only question for you then will be, do you believe it? That, dear friends, is totally up to you. Amen.