

“When I Was Hungry.....”

*Bible Reading:
2 Kings 4: 1-7*

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH
NEPEAN, ONTARIO

The biblical account for this evening begins in tragedy and desperation. We can get some contemporary sense of this from the news media, which has in recent weeks shown us images of desperate mothers, refugees from Afghanistan, holding an infant and begging on a street corner.

Strict Islamic law forbids them from working. In some refugee camps, they cannot even stand in line for food. Only men are permitted. Women without a husband or brother to care for them are left in the worst of poverty and desperation.

They often face a cruel, hungry dead-end future.

Barely living, at best.

Such was the case throughout the Ancient Middle East - in the days of Elisha, too. The widow in 2 Kings 4 faced a bleak future. We don't know much about her situation, other than she was at the end of her resources. Beyond the end, because the creditors were breathing down her neck.

Somehow she had fallen into the clutches of lenders who were willing to watch her walk to the edge, so to speak, and then step in behind her to prevent retreat. Then they would take everything away from her – including the only hope of care in the future, her sons.

Into that bitter, impoverished, hungry situation comes Elisha, prophet of God. Notice his careful approach - he doesn't barge in, wave a wand and in powerful domination change the future. Rather, he invites her to be a part of the process of change.

There is dignity in how he acts -

"How can I help you?" A question inviting a response.

"Tell me, what do you have in your house?" Seeking her resources.

Together, in faith, they take the very little that is found and step out in faith.

Elisha shows faith by calling the widow to action.

The widow demonstrates faith by sending her sons to the neighbors.

Bold action by both of them.

Bold action reinforced by the quiet support of neighbors who lend this little family a few extra jars that they have laying around the house.

Were there questions?

We are not told, but doubtlessly there were. Probably from both the widow and the community.

Embarrassment, perhaps at having to ask for so many jars. Suspicion at what a poor neighbor would want with so many jars. But the contributions happen.

The steps in faith are made.

Elisha.

The widow.

The community

Each taking a step, large or small, in faith.

Each doing it in the presence of the God of life, the God proclaimed by Psalm 27 as the Source of light and hope and protection.

They each act.

And He, in sovereign grace, responds to their acts of faith with a restoring miracle. The widow receives far more than she had dared to ask in her plea to Elisha.

The result is release, freedom and hope in this small family.

The widow is released from the shackles of the creditors.

Her sons are safe.

The neighbors have an unexpected source of oil.

She has an income stream to support herself in the future.

The Bible doesn't say - but it is easy to imagine that the widow, her sons, and some close neighbors rejoiced and praised God.

As can we when, in the care and under the blessing of this same powerful life-and-light God, miracles of small resources offered to Him continue to be reproduced today.

Through work of agencies such as CRWRC people can grow more food with limited resources, or they can find a job or begin a small business or receive a healthy check-up for their child.

Lives that once were full of despair and darkness, now see some hope injected. There is the possibility of a healthy future.

On this Hunger Awareness Sunday we give thanks to God for permitting us the privilege of serving as neighbors to such people in need. Instead of jars, we give a few dollars out the many that we have.

People, who have the call of God on their lives, go out to serve as Elisha's, agents of God's renewing hope and blessing – joining ideas and resources with the ideas and resources of fellow human beings all across the globe - stepping out in faith together, and watching in amazement as God blesses those steps and transforms lives.

The widow.

Her sons.

Elisha.

The community.

Remember the one other group of people involved in the story?

We haven't said much about them, yet.

It's the creditors.

The ones who seemed to offer the woman a hand, and later showed how deceptive that hand was as they came demanding repayment that she could not make.

They knew that from the start.

Few things change through time.

Including the willingness of people to step over and on others in their barge to the top; their rush for personal satisfaction and convenience personal luxury and gain.

Never mind what it costs others.

Historians tell us that the credit process in ancient Israel was very abusive. Laws DID allow for debts to be repaid by children working for the creditors. But they were supposed to be treated as hired servants - with some measure of freedom and dignity. In actual fact, vulnerable families were lured into financial traps by loan sharks, who tend seized children and sold them off into slavery — permanently.

It was the rich, using the poor to enhance their own riches.

The creditors.

On this Hunger Sunday I can't help but think about them as I think to our world situation where many developing nations are saddled by crippling debts. Some are, indeed, of their own making. But some..... well, you just have to wonder in who's interest the loan was made. In the interest of those who need the assistance? Or in the interest of nations such as Canada and the USA, who demand huge repayments that dominate and cripple national ability to develop in a sustaining manner?

Sometimes I can't help but wonder.

And sometimes, when I sit back and look at my own consumer-driven lifestyle, and that of so many people in our culture, a frenzied treadmill-like lifestyle –

– sometimes I can't help but wonder.

How much we consume.

How much we demand.

How hard we strive.

What does all this consuming and demanding do to the more vulnerable in our nation..... in our world?

Is there a way in which our consuming, rushing, money-driven society has turned us into world creditors who, from God's point of view, are not a lot different than the creditors in Elisha's day?

Sometimes I can't help but wonder.

And sometimes I can't help but wonder what our Lord will say on the day of His return – the Day of Judgement;

The day When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, and he sits on his throne in heavenly glory. And All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

And our Lord will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

And Christ will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

To the condemned Christ will say in judgement - "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

[Matthew 25]

Creditors..... or Elishas.

Which are we?

What does Jesus see?

Think about that as we watch this video, which has been loaned to us by Christian Reformed World Relief. It's called *Break Forth Into Joy*.

A bit of an in-your-face challenge to those of us caught in Canadian consumerism.

I'll give some time for comments and discussion after we've watched it.

So think about your reaction, and what you'd like to share with your brothers and sisters here after it's over.