

1 Kings 17:7-16
Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40
Acts 4:32-37
Luke 21:1-4

Sermon March 3rd 2019

Believe! God is Generous!

In the first week of this sermon series we heard stories that reflected some of the challenges we face when trying to be generous to others. In the second week we heard stories about how God's generosity is so unimaginable and life altering for us when we experience it. Last week we heard stories where our experience of God's generosity moves us to be generous to others.

Today, we hear stories where our belief in God's generosity for our lives moves us to be generous to others. For example, the widow in Zarephath is gathering up sticks to prepare one last meal for her son and her before they die of starvation. When Elijah encounters her, he asks if she could give him some water to drink, and some bread to eat. At first, she feels unable to help, because her son and her are on the verge of death from not having enough food. They only have enough in the jar for one last meal for the two of them.

In response to the widow's fears, Elijah invites her to trust in God. Elijah asks her to bake a cake with what little she has left. I'm sure her first thought is "didn't you just hear me a minute ago?" Elijah proclaims a promise from God to her that God will provide for her and her household including Elijah for the rest of this draught if she bakes this cake.

Now I don't know about you, but I would be having some serious doubts here. How is this little cake I am going to bake going to feed all three of us for the rest of this draught? Kind of like thinking the Oilers are going to make the playoffs.

Well, the widow believes in God's generosity and does what Elijah says. We find out later in the story that the widow, her son, and Elijah are provided for throughout the rest of the draught. The widow trusted in God's generosity, taking a leap of faith, and giving what little she has to feed a stranger. Belief in God's generosity moves us to be generous to others sometimes in unbelievable ways.

In the book of Acts this morning, we see that the early Christian communities create an environment where no one is in need. When people join the community, they sell their possessions and trust the apostles to disperse these resources with fairness. Like prophets, the apostles were seen as instruments of God's love and grace in their lives. The apostle's generosity or in other words,

God's generosity to everyone in the community moved the Jesus believers, the followers of these apostles to be generous. Barnabas sells his land with the belief that this money will help the apostles provide for the needs of all in the community. Barnabas takes a leap of faith, trusting that through the apostles God will provide for everyone's needs including his own. Belief in God's generosity moves us to be generous to others.

In our gospel this morning, Jesus is watching as people place their offerings in the treasury. He is amazed when he sees a poor widow put every cent she has in the treasury. She believed in God's generosity so much so that she gave everything she had with the hopes that even this little bit will help someone else in need. Belief in God's generosity moves us to be generous to others sometimes in unbelievable ways.

The other day I was in the car listening to the radio and they were talking about the benefits of welcoming immigration into rural areas across the country. The mayor in this small town in Manitoba shared a story about how their hospitality towards new immigrants turned their town from a town on the verge of extinction to a thriving new community. The new residents started up essential businesses that gave this town new life.

This town community decided to take a leap of faith even though they had fears about what their community would look like with these new immigrants. They believed in being generous, and this generosity moved the new members of the community to be generous. Belief in God's generosity moves us to be generous to others.

When reading the book "Contagious Generosity" last summer I came across a story shared by this small community church. During the 2007 recession many communities were hit hard. Especially, smaller communities that relied on the manufacturing sectors. Many of the churches in these communities tightened up to survive the long road ahead.

In a small town in the Midwest this community church decided to pool all their resources together and create programs that helped provide for the needs of all those in the community that lost their jobs. Even though the church itself was struggling they took a leap of faith believing that God's generosity will provide for them. And amazingly this church community and the wider community didn't only survive. They thrived. Belief in God's generosity moves us to be generous to others.

In Alberta we have been hit hard by the 2015 recession. Like this small community church are we the churches in this province taking a leap of faith

choosing generosity over fear and anxiety? I can't speak for every church in our province, but in Calgary as the Southwest area we the churches have sponsored three refugee families during this recession. Welcoming immigration into our province even in these times of struggle. We believe in God's generosity to provide for our needs, and this moves us to be generous and hospitable to others.

In our own congregation the recession challenged us to dedicate a Sunday a month where a portion of our offering goes to help support the food bank provide for people during this tough time. Some of us have been heavily impacted by this recession, but we continue to believe that God will provide for our needs. Freeing us to be generous to others in need. Belief in God's generosity moves us to be generous to others.

And we believe in the power of God's generosity, because we have all been recipients of God's generosity. The widow and Elijah are fed well during the rest of the draught. Barnabas is taken care of and becomes a vital person in Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. We don't know what the future of the widow who Jesus praises will be. But, I would be confident in saying Jesus probably welcomed her into his community where widows were treated with fairness.

Reflecting now on our life how many times have we been a recipient of God's generosity? How many times are we amazed at how much God is generous to us? God comes to us in Jesus to show us just how generous God is. Generous enough to forgive us when we fall short. Generous enough to provide for our needs. Generous enough to reach out and heal us. Generous enough to breathe new life into us. Belief in God's generosity moves us to be generous to others sometimes in unbelievable ways.

Let us pray, generous God, we give thanks that you provide for our needs. Open our hearts to believe in your generosity. Moving us to be generous to others.

Amen.