

“WHEN A MOTHER’S OIL RUNS OUT.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Text: II Kings 4:1-7

Introduction.

Scripture says that we should honor our fathers and mothers and I want to honor mothers and motherhood today.

But I also know that this is an emotional issue for quite a few of us. Some of us no longer have our mothers and we miss them. Some of us had mothers that for whatever reason weren't very good mothers or failed us, so the subject can be painful. Some of us desperately want to be mothers and that's especially painful.

Our pain and suffering and heartaches are known to God intimately and He is Lord over all our suffering. It's never meaningless in the hands of our God who makes all things meaningful.

In the midst of all these mixed emotions we can still affirm that mothers and motherhood are gifts from God.

I want to affirm this morning that motherhood is the highest calling that a woman can have. No career or job on earth takes more diligence, perseverance, hard work, prayer and faith. And there is also no more soul-satisfying labor than raising God-fearing and God-loving children.

It is hard work but it is good work. Because it's hard work I want to preach a word of encouragement this morning to all mothers and to all who aspire to be mothers and to all who play a role in supporting mothers (like aunts and uncles).

Galatians 6:9 Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

II Kings 4:1-7.

Let's meet the two people in our text.

There is a young woman who was the mother of two sons and until recently was the wife of a prophet, a man of God who feared the Lord.

With only that much information we might surmise that the debt wasn't from sinful living, but through some unfortunate or uncontrollable circumstance. He may have suffered at the hands

of merciless men or scam artists. Though it's possible he was unwise in some business affair, or had an investment go bad. That happens to the best of us.

To be a widow with two children in these times was a terrible hardship, so it's hard to image the added burden of an unpayable debt and the prospect of having her two sons sold into slavery.

How many sleepless nights filled with tears had she spent? The children of God sometimes undergo the severest of afflictions, crushing burdens.

Elisha was the prophet in Israel. He had received the mantel of prophecy from Elijah. Elisha was a well-respected and well-loved man of God, a prophet and pastor to the people of Israel.

God had given Israel many laws about how to protect and care for vulnerable people so that they would not be taken advantage of or abused or fall through the cracks in the political system.

But when Israel wandered from the ways of God and pursued the gods of the other nations things fell apart and abuses entered in such as widows being trapped in debt and their children being taken and sold into slavery by impatient or merciless creditors.

When God is removed from the center of life, huge social changes begin to take place, massive shifts in politics and in the courts of law, that have consequences in the daily lives of people, especially those without means to protect themselves. The strong began to oppress the poor.

Remember Naboth, who was robbed of his vineyard and killed at the hands of the Baal worshipping Jezebel so her husband, King Ahab could take his land. And now in Israel Ahab's son Jehoram was on the throne and he did evil in the sight of the Lord as Ahab had.

The roots of false religion always lead to oppression, abuse, and neglect. Apostasy will always show up in bad laws, evil court decisions and unfair taxes and applications of the law. We are only seeing the beginning in abortion, same-sex marriage, legalization of marijuana, and euthanasia. Apostasy will continue to erode the freedoms of the righteous.

Psalm 11:3 When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

In the face of systemic or political injustice there may be little we can do. We may not be able to stand against the tides of culture. But we can help one person, one at a time. We can make a difference right where we are.

We may not be able to make abortion illegal, but we can give one young mom a reason to keep her baby.

We may not be able to stop the destruction of marriage, but we can help our children and friends to see the wisdom of God in the gift of marriage as between one man and one woman.

We can be a light in darkness, we can stand for God and His Word.

This poor widow mother finds herself trapped and she cries out for justice. She seeks God for vindication. She appeals to Elisha, the prophet of God, and God shows He cares and is concerned about the affairs of the weak and defenseless.

Elisha's instructions to the widow.

She began with a confession of helplessness.

“Tell me what you have in your house?” “I have nothing except a small flask of oil.” The flask of oil is an afterthought, it's part of the nothing.

It's like saying, “I owe ten thousand dollars and I have nothing. Well, OK, I have ten dollars, but it might as well be nothing.”

The widow was destitute, without resources. Her debt was so great it was hopeless.

In our relationship with God we are the ones empty, always in need of more, always debtors, *we are always receivers.*

What do we have that we have not been given?

What circumstance are we in that God has not ordained?

What do we have that we can boast about as our own doing?

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Apart from Him we are nothing.

Apart from Him we have nothing.

Apart from Him we can do nothing.

God loves to take a very little and multiply it. It removes our boasting and magnifies His grace and goodness.

Gideon and three hundred men stood up against an entire Midianite army.

A small stone in a slingshot brought down a mighty giant.

Five loaves and two fish fed five thousand.

The fact that we have nothing is never an excuse to doubt or stop trusting God.

II Corinthians 6:10 ... having nothing, yet possessing everything.

She had to depend on others.

It's a mercy to hear that the world was not just filled with robbers and thieves and ruthless collectors. There were kind neighbors, people willing to help, to lend, to serve, to give. God often helps us through neighbors, just as He often helps our neighbors through us.

It's sad when Christians are too proud or too humble to accept help from someone else. Even Jesus accepted help from friends. He received the ministry of the many women who served and helped Him.

The neighbors didn't see how their small act of kindness was used in the life of this poor widow. We often will have no idea what some small blessing will turn into in someone else's life.

We never know how God might use our smallest gesture, our cup of cold water, our encouraging greeting, our kind word, our helping hand.

In fact the deeds we do that seem the most insignificant to us may be the ones that God turns into a huge blessing to someone else. Behind closed doors God is working miracles.

We need to be willing to ask for help, it's an exercise of faith, and it gives another person the opportunity to exercise their faith.

I needed help moving my office and books from here to across the street and then back again. It was a huge job and I couldn't do it by myself. I had to ask for help, and so many people helped. I know I was blessed and I can't repay their kindness. And they were blessed to be able to help.

Don't begrudge having to ask and don't begrudge being ask, it's all part of a miracle.

She faithfully obeys each step.

She did what the man of God told her to do. Without question, without explanation, without understanding, without knowing what the result would be.

Obedience is a huge part of faith. Obedience is a huge part of finding God faithful in meeting our needs. We limit God's work in our lives and His blessing in our lives by our lack of faith and by our lack of obedience. What has God called you to do that you are not doing?

She received as much as she had vessels for.

This reveals the character of God, He is rich and generous beyond measure. God magnifies His glory in His power and generosity and kindness. The more vessels she had the more God was glorified and more she was blessed. How often do we limit God when we rely on what we can only do in our strength?

How often do we limit God when we don't take Him at His Word?

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Ephesians 3:20 [He] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

Philippians 4:19 God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

He who paid such a huge price to set us free, how much more might He do in our lives and in our homes and in our families if we surrendered and submitted and freely confessed our weakness, our need, our dependence, our emptiness?

Application and conclusion.

Allow me a couple points of application.

First, I want to acknowledge two ministries in our church that are Elisha-like ministries.

We have a deacon's benevolence fund that is available for any one in any kind of financial need. It's like a flask of oil that doesn't run out. You keep filling it as it's used. It has been used a good bit lately and today's offering is filling up the oil again. It blesses me that it's being used and that you are generous in making funds available to meet needs.

This ministry glorifies God and reflects His character toward us. If you have a need, ask.

Another Elisha-like ministry is the meals that our Fellowship Ministry team organizes for those needing that kind of assistance, either after a baby is born or after someone has surgery or in the case of spouses caring for spouses.

I talk to those who receive this ministry and they can't thank the church enough for the huge help this is.

If you would be willing to make a meal four to six times a year to help someone else let Marilyn McCoy know or any member of the Fellowship Ministry team. There is a real need. And there are those who need it who don't ask.

Let us be thankful for our deacons and for our Fellowship Ministry team that help us fulfill the Word of God and extend the love of Jesus to those in need.

Second, moms, what do you do when you are empty, when you are exhausted, when your oil runs out? What a picture we have here of how all-sufficient God is after every human resource is exhausted.

Make your requests known to the Lord. And then pour yourself out and know that the filling will not be based on your meager resources but on the resources of God.

God is the creator and sustainer of all things.

God is enthroned above the heavens and He governs and rules over all.

He is clothed in majesty and splendor, with power, authority, wisdom, and goodness.

Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His permission.

Not a hair falls from our heads without His direct knowledge.

He daily leads the sun like a bridegroom out of his chamber.

He robes the lily and clothes the grass and feeds the ravens and lions.

He is the all sufficient Father who owns the cattle on a thousand hills.

He has manifested His grace and goodness in Jesus Christ and He knows our every need.

My wife raised five sons and she did it with barely a flask of oil. She went to sleep most nights utterly exhausted with no clue how she could do it for one more day.

God wasn't asking her to just give a little more, God wasn't asking her to just squeeze a little more blood out of a turnip. God was asking her to give what she didn't have any of. Take your empty flask of oil and pour. Pour your empty flask into these children. As long as she poured, God filled.

For 33 years she has been pouring out of an empty flask and God has been filling. It's a miracle I have been blessed to watch behind closed doors all these 33 years.

If she had said "I don't have enough so I can't do it," or if she had said "but I have to save some back for myself" then there would have been no more oil.

Moms, keep pouring out of your emptiness, out of your inadequacy, even out of your exhausted resources, and God will fill.

And dads, the same is true for you. When you come home from work exhausted from a long day and all you want to do is sit and stare at the TV or go work in the shop, come along side your wife and pour your empty flask with hers. You won't see the miracle unless you pour what you don't have. One day the vessels will be filled and the oil will stop.

And if it seems like He isn't answering as soon as you think He should, continue to trust His promises and obey His Word. Keep praying, keep obeying, keep pouring and He will answer and He will fill.

The same is true for elders and deacons.

Life is lived dependent on the grace of God. It is not lived on works or on our strength or our self-sufficiency. It is lived on His daily bread, on His daily provision.

“Grace alone which God supplies; Strength unknown He will provide.”

Don't be discouraged about your little, don't despise the means, don't doubt the amount. We believe in the God who makes much out of very little.

Closing encouragement:

Motherhood is a high and holy calling. It is hard work but it is good work. Be diligent and faithful and fruitful whether God has given you one or a dozen.

Let me remind you, repetition is a glorious thing. Don't weary of the routine. Learn contentment in the routine and in the unexpected and unplanned. God delights in every sunrise.

Moms, listen to this. Your countless mundane, routine, boring, repetitive gifts of sacrifice and service will be multiplied by God into huge blessings in the lives of your family. Someday they will rise up and call you blessed. What you do now you do by faith.

Pray more and worry less. Give thanks more and complain less.

And please, at the end of each day, never say you didn't get anything done, it's a lie from Satan meant to discourage you. Your work is a long obedience in the same direction and it is by faith.

Moms and dads pour out your lives for your children. Don't resent the pouring and the emptying. One day you will be filled again and all the pouring will have been worth it.

II Corinthians 3:4-6 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, 6 who has made us sufficient.

Prayer:

Holy Father, who is sufficient for these things? Thank you that whatever you call us to do, whether it's to be a mother or father, to be an elder or deacon, to serve in your church or in our community, it doesn't rest on our resources or our personalities or our money or time, but on the greatness of our God. Glorify yourself in our weakness and inadequacy that we might boast in you alone.