

Always Enough

St. Mark Lutheran
Three services

Pastor Ken Welsh
Nov. 11, 2018

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. Hebrews 9:27-28

It is almost over. What am I talking about? It's the season of Pentecost. The Lutheran church observes various seasons on our church calendar as we focus on different things. The observance of the season of Pentecost began for us way back on May 20, as we concentrated on the dramatic coming of the Holy Spirit and all the excitement of that first Pentecost.

But that season gives way to reflection about a time of prolonged waiting for the people of God and his church. There are just a few Sundays left in the church year, and our Epistle reading from Hebrews for this day begins to draw our attention to the close of the age and the promise of Christ's second coming. It says, "Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." I hope you can be here the next two weeks as Pastor Mark and I discuss the words of Jesus and his predictions about the close of the age.

The church of today, like the church of yesterday, finds itself waiting. Waiting can be difficult. People generally do not like to wait if they are looking forward to something. Americans in particular do not like to wait. In addition, life can often feel like you are running on empty. It may seem like the "same old things" as we live out our lives, and we often seem to be running low on energy and resources. Our readings today address that by encouraging us to put our trust in the Lord. Psalm 146:3 says the same thing in a little different way: "Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation."

God's Word teaches us from two examples this morning. It gives us a look at two unlikely heroes who stand as examples of trust and faithfulness in God's Word and promises. From 1 Kings we learn about King Ahab in chapter 16. He became king and married Jezebel. Together they did a great evil in the eyes of the Lord, by leading the people to worship other gods. Ahab even built a temple and began to worship the false god Baal. He really provoked the true God to anger.

So God sent his representative, the prophet Elijah, who told Ahab this: "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

I am sure you understand that Elijah's life was in great danger after this little speech to King Ahab. The Lord directed Elijah to go into hiding. Now to which strong, protected, well-to-do family did God send him? Here is where the account gets a little strange. The Lord sent Elijah to a widow in Zarephath that was anything BUT well off! The widow seemingly had nothing to offer. She was living in a land of scarcity. She was getting ready to prepare a final meal for herself and her son so "that we may eat it and die". (1 Kings 17:12)

Elijah started off by asking her for some water. Then he asked for some bread. She didn't have any bread. She only had a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil for what would be their last meal. Elijah told her not to be afraid, and that she should make a small cake for him and she and her son could eat the rest. He made her a promise that the Lord himself would provide for her. She was reluctant, but she did what she had been asked to do.

There is another widow in our message this morning. We met her in the Gospel reading for today. (Mark 12:38-44) Jesus, of all people, is sitting down opposite the treasury at the synagogue, watching people put money into the offering box. A poor widow came by and put in two small coins, having a total worth of about a penny. People might see that and think "What a tiny offering!", but our Lord knew something that the people didn't. She had put in everything that she had. She had sacrificed all that she had left to live on. It was a great offering in the eyes of the Lord. By the way, I believe that Jesus is still looking at what people put in the offering box. It tells a lot about you.

Now this may all seem very nice to us, but what if it were us in these situations and not them? You see, it is not at all that easy. Human logic and our sinful human nature can really affect us. What do I mean by that? If we were down to our last meal around the house, would we give part of it away? If we were running out of money, would we be giving an offering at church? Some would say that would be crazy!

If we are honest about it, scarcity prompts us to shift into our preservation and protecting modes. Most of us are happy to give when the cupboards are full and the checking account is looking healthy. What I am saying is, we trust in our abundance. That's our logical way of thinking.

Yet our logical way of thinking can sometimes be a hindrance to Christians. What do we really trust in, our possessions or almighty God? Do you remember a few weeks ago when we read the story of a rich young man in Mark 10. He was really well off, but there was one thing he did not have. He wanted to know how he could be sure he would receive eternal life.

Now it is not a sin to be rich. But the Holy Scriptures warn about the dangers of loving our money more than God. Jesus knew the heart of this young man and he knew that his money was a problem. So he said to him, "One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." The young man's face fell and he went away sad.

Logic is a gift from God. But sometimes the way we depend on logic gets in the way of what God is trying to teach us. The accounts of both the widows teach the same lesson. God sometimes uses scarcity as a doorway to trust. That we should trust in the Lord and his provision is the only way either of these stories makes sense. A widow obeyed, and here is what happened. The jar of flour was not used up, and the jar of oil did not run dry. That's not all. Sometime later her son became deathly ill and stopped breathing. But Elijah was there, and the Lord heard Elijah's cry for help, and the boy's life returned to him and he lived. The Bible doesn't say what happened to the other widow, but it certainly seems that Jesus would have seen she received help. When we trust in the Lord, there is always enough. That doesn't necessarily mean that we get all we want, but we get what we need.

If you really think about it, God has been using scarcity to lead his people to trust for a long time. He provided manna in the desert when his people left Egypt. He brought water from a rock. With just five loaves and two fish, Jesus fed thousands of men, women, and children. Yes, with Jesus there is always enough.

Jesus is enough in an even more important way. He did enough to pay the full price of our sin. His main mission was not really about multiplying food to fill our stomachs, but about ransom and restoration and freeing our souls from our sins. Again, Hebrews tells us that "He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Those who believe and are baptized do not need to be worried about their salvation. Jesus is always enough.

It is into the full sufficiency of Christ that we have been baptized. You have been joined with him and receive the benefits of his life, death, and resurrection. What if you were to lose your home, and your wealth, or all that you possess by tomorrow? We would not like it, but as God's redeemed children, we need not fear scarcity. Our main Father is a God of rich abundance, and with Christ, there is always enough. Amen.