

## The Rewards of Giving

April 10, 2016

Last week we celebrated Communion Sunday and we talked about what it means to us for the Lord to give his body and blood to save sinners.

If you follow the life of Christ, you will learn that He constantly gave of himself to others. He demonstrated to a young lad what He could do with 5 small loaves and 2 fish when he gave what he had to the Lord. Jesus blessed the lad's lunch, broke the fish and bread and the disciples distributed the food to 5000 men plus women and children.

See Matthew 14:13. That young boy got a first-hand experience of what Jesus can do when a person gives what he has into the hands of the Creator of the universe. I hope the lad was there when the 12 baskets of leftovers were gathered.

We are limited in our human capacity to multiply what we have been given. But if we have faith in Jesus Christ and we offer what we have, He blesses it, multiplies it, and causes it to provide for others in a way that we would never dream of.

There is an amazing story in 1 Kings chapter 17. Because of the sins of God's people, Elijah, God's prophet, met with King Ahab and told him that there would be no rain in that area until he gave the word. Then God told Elijah to go across the Jordan River and hide near Cherith Creek. He would be able to drink water from the creek and God would send ravens to feed him. Elijah obeyed God and sure enough, ravens brought bread and meat to Elijah twice a day and he quenched his thirst from the water of the creek. But after a while, the creek dried up because there had been no rain.

The LORD told Elijah to go to a town of Zarephath in Sidon and live there. He had commanded a widow in that town to give Elijah food. When Elijah came near the town gate of Zarephath, he saw a woman gathering sticks for a fire. He called to her, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink." And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her and said, "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand."

The widow answered, "In the name of the living LORD your God, I swear that I don't have any bread. All I have is a handful of flour and a little olive oil. I'm on my way home now with these few sticks to cook what I have for my son and me. After that, we will starve to death."

Elijah told her not to be afraid. He told her to go and do as she had planned, but he asked that she make a little cake for him first and bring it to him and afterwards, make some for her and her son. He promised her that the LORD God of Israel would provide meal for the barrel and oil in the cruise until the day that the LORD would send rain on the earth.

She went and did according to the words of Elijah and Elijah, the widow and her son ate for many days. The barrel of meal was not used up neither did the cruise of oil become empty for many days just as the LORD God had spoken to Elijah.

The widow had run out of options. There was nothing she could do about her plight. Yet her faith was tested when Elijah asked for a drink of water and a small cake before she cooked for herself and her son. She obeyed and put her trust in the words of the prophet and God kept filling the barrel with meal and the jug of oil multiplied daily until the rain fell from heaven once again.

I read a story that seemed to have God's hand in it today and I want to share it with you. Leslie, a young lady photographer who resides in Canada, enjoys photography. Her favorite pastime is to take photographs of old abandoned property. She enjoys snapping pictures of old roller skates, sewing machines, old pianos and other discarded items that make interesting photos. One day as she was out looking for such properties, she came across a building that looked abandoned. The land around the property was so overgrown that the house was almost completely hidden among the trees and weeds. The roof of the house was caving in and the interior of the place was unkempt and it looked deserted. However, as she went from room to room, she came upon an elderly man sitting in an overstuffed chair in the living room. He was a lonely soul with one eye missing and cataracts clouding the vision of the other eye. He had a very difficult time moving around so most of his time was spent sitting in his chair by himself. He was surprised to see Leslie, but her good natured smile and friendliness prompted him to allow her to take his picture. He enjoyed their visit and she asked if she could return to spend time with him. He was delighted that she had come as he rarely left his house and he had not been around people for a long time. Leslie began stopping by with lunch and sharing her stories with him. She even had her friends come to help fix up the house and soon the place was livable and warm. Old junk and trash was removed and Lawrence began to look forward to returning to church and being around people that he had withdrawn from so long ago. He invited Leslie to go along and she was thrilled to take him in her car to the event. They attended a church BBQ that was sponsored by farmers in the neighborhood and Leslie began to see zest for living return to the old man. Leslie calls it a great blessing that God has brought such a wonderful person into her life and she has spent many hours listening and sharing with her new found friend. Later he suffered a stroke and now he resides in an assisted living facility, but Leslie and her dog visit regularly and they are always welcomed with a smile and a warm hand shake. She has made a big difference in a man's life that had isolated himself from the world, friends and God and now has been restored.

In the story of the woman at the well in John chapter 4, I am intrigued by the ending of the chapter. This woman who had been a social outcast, a person of ill repute and who had suffered for the choices that she had made in her life, finds relief from her guilt and shame after her conversation with Jesus. She dropped her water pot and immediately headed to the city and said to the men, "Come see a man who told me all things that I ever did. Is not this the Christ?" The men left the city and came to the place where Jesus was to find

out for themselves. In verse 39 it states that many of the Samaritans believed on Jesus due to the woman's testimony that he revealed everything about her when He talked with her. They asked Jesus to tarry in Samaria and He stayed with them for two days. In verse 41 it reads, "And many more believed on Him because of His words". They told the woman that they now believed, not just because of her testimony but they had investigated and listened to Jesus speak and were now convinced that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

Jesus had said that a prophet doesn't receive honor in his own country, but the people of Samaria believed and received Him as the Messiah.

I wonder how many people would believe if we would just open our mouths and testify of the wonderful things that God has done for us. Do we dare to get involved in ministry that is out of our comfort zone? Are we willing to take risks for the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do we have a picture in our minds of what type of ministry we are willing to participate in and any other just wouldn't suffice?

I remember a delightful song that we use to sing in church when I was a child. It was written by Ira D. Ogdon (1872-1964). She was a public school teacher who aspired to have an evangelistic career. However, before she got launched in this endeavor, her father became very ill and she abandoned her dream to take care of him. In 1913 she wrote "Brighten the Corner where you are." She wrote it to remind Christians that the pulpit and the mission field are not the only places a person might make a difference for the Kingdom of God. She also wrote a couple other songs with the same theme. They are "Carry your cross with a smile" and "What would Jesus Do?"

A well-known musician composed the music to Ira's song and it has been sung in many Sunday Schools and churches of many denominations around the world. Several music artists have recorded it including the great American jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald.

Brighten the Corner where you are.  
Do not wait until some deed of greatness you may do,  
Do not wait to shed your light afar,  
To the many duties ever near you now be true,  
Brighten the corner where you are.

Refrain:

Brighten the corner where you are!  
Brighten the corner where you are!  
Someone far from harbor you may guide across the bar;  
Brighten the corner where you are.

**Just above are clouded skies that you may help to clear  
Let not narrow self your way debar;  
Though into one heart alone may fall your song of cheer,  
Brighten the corner where you are.**

**Refrain**

**Here for all your talent you may surely find a need,  
Here reflect the Bright and Morning Star;  
Even from your humble hand the Bread of Life may feed,  
Brighten the corner where you are.**

**Colossians 3:17 "And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."**