

Keith Wagner tells the story that there is a library in Derby Line, Vermont that is built on the Vermont-Canada Border. Step through the front door of the Haskell Library and you are in the United States. Walk across the carpeted floor to the circulation desk and you are in Canada. But if you sit down on the couch, you are back in the U.S. The library has enjoyed a kind of informal immunity from border restrictions for over 100 years. But after 9-11 the Border Patrol was worried about three unguarded streets linking Derby Line with Stanstead, Quebec, Canada. Then came the more recent border closure due to the pandemic. Instead of parking their cars outside the library in Quebec and walking to the front door in the U.S., Canadian patrons will have to detour through one of two ports of entry linking the municipalities. And the only crossings allowed by U.S. and Canadian authorities as recent as a month ago are emergency or essential personnel.

People who have used the library for a lifetime may also have to present their identification every time they check out a book. It seems like we live in a day and age when no one trusts anyone anymore. Let's be honest, a library is not what most of us consider a hotbed for terrorists. I'm for common sense security, but if we cannot trust neighbors, we will likely lose our trust in God.

Here in First Kings we have a story about Elijah, who puts his trust in God, who wields power over life and death. God has called him to go to Zarephath which is a pagan city that worshiped Baal. The region was having a great drought and there was little food for the people. God told him a widow would supply him with food. Widows in that society were totally destitute. They had little or no resources. In other words, Elijah had to cross the line of religion, the line of nationality and the line of economic class. But Elijah trusted God and set out for Zarephath.

When he arrives, there is a widow who approaches him at the town gate. All the widow had was some flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. Elijah told her to make him a small cake of bread so he would have something to eat. He also

told her to make some for her and her son. Elijah then said, *“The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land”* (v. 14). The widow did what Elijah asked. Somehow, this Phoenician woman trusted him as she used her last resource to feed a total stranger.

Would you give a total stranger your last dollar? Would you give your neighbor your last box of cereal in your food pantry? Can we trust that God will always provide for us in every circumstance? I’m afraid most of us would not. We are accustomed of stockpiling and saving things in case of an emergency. We build storage buildings and keep them locked. We surround our lives with all kinds of protection: insurance, financial reserves, supplies, tools and equipment. Our society often seems obsessed with security. I can’t imagine anyone giving away their last meal like this widow did for Elijah.

Apparently, she trusted God too. And yet, she was living in a foreign culture that worshiped Baal. One wonders where she learned to trust God. Perhaps the God we worship is more far reaching than we realize. Perhaps God dwells in other cultures, lands and societies in spite of their native religion.

Besides the fact that Elijah and the widow both trusted God, this story also tells us that God provided for their needs. First, Elijah was fed. And secondly, the widow had ample provisions, *“So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah”* (vss. 15-16).

Sometimes it is not that we lack the resources we need, but it is our perception of what we need. We see what we have is running low, rather than seeing that we still have some left.

One day, there was a blind man sitting on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet and a sign that read: “I am blind, please help.” A creative publicist was walking by and stopped to observe. He saw that the blind man had only a few coins in his hat. He dropped in more coins and, without asking for permission,

took the sign and rewrote it. He returned the sign to the blind man and left. That afternoon the publicist returned to the blind man and noticed that his hat was full of bills and coins. The blind man recognized his footsteps and asked if he was the one who had rewritten his sign and wanted to know what he had written on it. The publicist responded: “Nothing that was not true. I just wrote the message a little differently.” He smiled and went on his way. The new sign read: “Today is Spring and I cannot see it.”

Other times we are afraid to let go, for fear of not having enough. The widow didn't believe she had enough. *“As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug”* (v. 12). Although she trusted God enough to go to the gate, she was still skeptical about having the resources to feed Elijah.

Elijah responded to the widow by saying, *“Do not be afraid.”* He reassured the widow that she could feed both him and her family. How often do we hear that phrase in scripture, *“Do not be afraid”*? She had nothing to fear and neither do we. God is always with us, providing what we need.

We fail to trust that the Lord will provide. We don't believe in the impossible because we can't understand how God works. The story doesn't tell us how it was that the widow happened to come to the town gate. Nor do we know how she was able to have food for many days after that. How God works is often times simply mysterious.

In World War II, a soldier got separated from his unit and was trapped behind enemy lines. The enemy knew he was there and he had little chance of escape. He found a cave and he hid. He knew that it was just a matter of time before they found the cave too. He prayed to God, “God if you can, please save me, but I trust your will. If I am to die, let me die bravely, and take care of my family. Amen.”

He lifted his head and saw a spider busily building a web over the opening of the cave. Back and forth she went. “Silly spider,” he thought. “We're both going to be blasted to bits. I need a brick wall and I get a spider web?” He

heard the crunch of boots and loud talking in a language he didn't understand. But he did understand two words: "spider web." As the enemy soldiers walked away, he realized that because the mouth of the cave was now covered with a spider web they thought no one was in the cave. The spider web had become as strong as a brick wall. God may not give us what we want, but God gives us what we need. (*Homiletics*, June 2007)

To further illustrate the amazing power of God, Elijah healed the son of the widow. The widow believed she was being punished for helping a man of God. But Elijah "*cried out to the Lord*" for help. The child was healed because of Elijah's faith. Once again, he trusted in God to provide and his forgiving, loving God came through. And the widow responded by saying, "*Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth*" (v. 24).

Let's ask ourselves: Do we trust God enough to give someone our last meal? Do we truly believe that God will supply all our needs? Can we believe in the impossible and believe that God is able to work in ways beyond our limited understanding?

"*Don't be afraid,*" Elijah said. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, who wields power over life and death. Amen.

(Thanks to Dr. Keith Wagner for sermon ideas)