

February 18

“When the Pantry is Bare”

Elijah and the Widow

**Scripture Focus: 1 Kings 17:12-13**

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**13 Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.**

**Special Music:**

**“Empty”**

**Tauren Wells**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGkr3LSe9Q>

## WHATCHA GOT?



### “When the Pantry is Bare”

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## **1 Kings 17:7-14**

**7** Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.

**8** Then the word of the Lord came to him:

**9** “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.”

**10** So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?”

**11** As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

**12** “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. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

**13** Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.

**14** For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘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.’”

## *A Lesson for Amanda*

Amanda Everly was the creator of fine musical instruments. Most of her creations were made from wood, formed and carved by hand. Guitars, flutes, lutes, zithers, drums, and sundry tools for crafting music. She used the choicest wood and the finest materials. The paints, stains, and varnishes were carefully chosen to best fit and give each instrument a unique and beautiful tone. Amanda's craftsmanship was highly in demand in her area, and she seldom wanted for work. Orders came in faster than she could fill them, and her backlog was more than a year at times. People simply loved the individual touches that Amanda brought to each one of her creations.

Amanda often worked alone because she couldn't bring herself to allow anyone else to refine her work. Every piece had to be just right. Occasionally she would bring in a couple of neighbors to help her with packing or delivery. But the instruments themselves were all hers in every way. She even made sure that her initials were on every piece that left her shop. The recipients of her craftsmanship were proud to tell people that they had an instrument created by Amanda Everly. Her fame as a craftsman grew with every purchase. Some of her instruments even found their way into museums or the hands of extraordinary musicians. Amanda's future looked bright, and it seemed nothing could slow her down.

But that all changed with the great fire. Amanda's shop wasn't affected by the fire, but her suppliers suddenly had nothing to bring her. There was no fine

wood to be found anywhere in the region. What little remained of the forests in the area became protected so that new forests could grow from the ashes. The available materials in Amanda's shop dwindled with every order that went out. Her once overflowing racks of wood were now close to empty. Although she had a nest egg, that would not be sufficient to last until the wood from the forest once again became available.

Amanda thought about importing wood, but felt that the additional cost would drive the prices for her instruments out of the range for most people. Still, she had to make a living somehow. Amanda chatted with other local businesspeople in her area who were suffering from the same predicament. Those who built houses were frightened knowing that they might have to go out of business. Local carpenters could not afford to retool their shops to handle other materials. So many businesses began to suffer, which meant the people living in the area also began to suffer. It looked like poverty would soon take over the area.

Amanda met with her pastor and explained her problem to him. She wasn't sure how he could be of help but thought maybe he could provide some inspiration on how to continue. "Amanda," he said, "Have you bothered talking about this problem with God? Have you prayed about it?"

"Well, no pastor," she replied. "What can God do about it? Even if he encourages the trees to grow, it will be at least 7-10 years before they will be available for use."

“Oh, my dear Amanda,” the pastor said. “How do you know what God can do if you don’t take the problem to him? You seem to believe that the only answer to your dilemma is a solution that you yourself have come up with. And you just told me how impractical that is. It is when we realize that the cupboard is bare that God encourages us to look for his solutions. You have heard me preach on Proverbs 3:5-6

**5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
6 in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.**

God has answers to questions that we don’t even know how to ask. Why don’t you reach out to him and see what he tells you?”

Amanda was a little skeptical but decided she would give it a try. What could it hurt? She didn’t have anywhere else to turn. She hadn’t really given much thought to her faith when it came to things like this. Maybe there was a lesson to be learned here.

That night, Amanda laid out the problem to God in her own words, but she just couldn’t seem to help giving God a suggestion. “God, this problem could be solved if you would just made the trees grow super-fast.”

A small voice whispered in her heart, reiterating what she already knew. If the trees did grow super-fast, they would probably not produce the quality of

wood she was used to. Her creations would be subpar. Her reputation and legacy were built not only on the quality of her work, but also on the quality of her materials.

Then God whispered to her again, “Amanda, go to the forest and examine the burned trees and see what you can find. I think you will be surprised.”

Amanda thought that would be a wasted trip, but since the idea was gnawing at her, she left the next day for the burned-out forest in her old pickup truck.

It took the better part of a day to reach the forest, so she stayed at a local motel that was still standing after the fire. Early in the morning she reached the edge of the forest. Soft billows of smoke were still rising from the ash left by the blackened stumps and burned trees. She carried her ax and tree saw into the ugliness that once had been covered with beautiful trees. Amanda examined a few of the stumps and pulled at a couple of branches. “Worthless,” she thought. And then something occurred to her. What if she were to peel back the blackened bark and check the core of the stumps and limbs. Using her axe and saw, she went to work, knocking off the dead bark, seeking what was beneath.

And there she found a most amazing thing. At the center of the stump, she found a hardened core of beautifully textured wood. Yes, it showed the ugliness of the trauma that the tree had been through, but that just added to its beauty. With a little work and skill, she could make some new and very beautiful instruments; instruments that showed the beauty that can only be found after suffering trauma. Beauty that could only be found in the pain of death of each tree. Beauty from the scars showing how the tree had suffered.

**Excited, Amanda began to harvest all that she could find and soon had filled her truck to overflowing. When she arrived back at her shop, she began to work with the wood and found to her joy the wonder of the dark grains in the branches and stumps that she had reclaimed from the ugliness of the ashes. There was salvation in the darkness of death found in that traumatized forest.**

**The new instruments that Amanda created held an even greater significance for the artists in the area. What had seemed to be the end of her career, was actually a new beginning. New creations rising from the ashes that no one thought could be salvaged. Amanda also decided that with each instrument that she sold, she would work with the local authorities to plant a new tree to encourage and reclaim the forest. And every night she recounted her blessings repeating the proverb that the pastor had shared with her.**

**5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
6 in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.**

**And with a renewed spirit and an eye that now saw the world through the eyes of God, she never again neglected to thank her Creator who was responsible for her salvation through his grace.**

**12 “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. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”**

**13 Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.**

**We have talked about this story before when we were discussing the life of Elijah, but the lesson was a little different than the one we will be talking about today. There is so much meat on this bone that I felt we need to return and engage with it. Most of us have, at some point in our lives, run out of something we needed; food, money, water, a roof over our head, a job, a vehicle to drive, a bed to sleep in, a coat, or medicine when we or someone we know is sick. Most of us have, at some point, struggled to make ends meet or realized that our current path was not going to take us to prosperity. If that has never happened to you, I am both happy and sad for you. Happy that you did not have to go through the torment and ugliness of facing the trauma and anxiety that comes with those situations. And sad for you because... well... you did not have to go through the torment and ugliness of facing the trauma and anxiety that comes with those situations.**

**“Pastor,” you say, “you can’t have it both ways.” And I tell you that I can. I don’t like to see anyone struggle. I met a young lady outside of Sagebrush Cafe the other that hadn’t eaten in three days. I was glad that I had the resources to**



help her out and make sure she got something to eat. It made all the difference for her. But if you have never faced that kind of situation, then you have never had the opportunity to understand the immensity of the gratitude that is felt when someone actually shows you that they care, especially a stranger. If you have never faced that kind of situation, then you most likely have continued to rely on your own brains, resources, and providence, rather than being forced to turn to God.

But... I have often wondered why it is that so many people only think that God can be found at the very bottom of the barrel, when the cupboard is bare, when there are no other options, when our stomach is rumbling and we can see no relief in sight. When in reality, God's abundance surrounds us and we don't really have to get to that point where the last straw is broken, the last egg is cracked, the last cent is spent in order to force us to turn to him. That usually only occurs because someone doesn't know about the opportunities that God has for them.

The problem, as I see it (and many do not look at it this way), is that people do not understand that the cupboard that we are reaching for, belongs to God, not us. We can be grateful for all the things we have, but when we think that everything is gone, we suddenly aren't so grateful. We think God has failed us. In reality, we have been trying to keep the pantry stocked ourselves when, as Christians, we should be allowing God to stock the pantry for us. We should know that God has covered us with his love and grace, and is going to take care of us. And if the cupboard looks bare, then God has a good reason. And it may

be bare to teach us a lesson, most often that we need to reconsider how that cupboard got stocked in the first place.

I'm not talking Prosperity Gospel here. I am talking about simple reliance on the grace and provisions of our loving God.

**22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.**

**23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.**

**24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!**

**25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?**

**26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?**

**27 "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.**

**28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!**

**29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.**

**30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.**

**31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.**

**Luke 12: 22-31**

**Why does Jesus spend so much time talking about this? Why, when he sends out his disciples, does he tell them to take nothing with them? Why does he talk about not having a place to rest his own head?**

**It's really not that difficult if we are listening to what he is saying. The problem is, we don't want to hear it and certainly don't want to live it. We've grown up in a world that has taught us that a real man or woman will learn to rely on their own assets and skills. We teach our children the same thing. But we are forgetting something extremely important that our parents often failed to teach us and that we forget to teach our children and grandchildren.**

**17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.**

**18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.**

**James 1:17-18**

**That's God's gold standard. But humanity's gold standard screams, "God helps those who help themselves." And believing that sets us up to be the judge and jury for the rest of humanity, a position relegated only to Jesus, not to us**

mere mortals. It removes the servant attitude that Jesus taught and exemplified and replaces it with a judgmental attitude where we humans determine the worthiness of the souls God sends us to serve. It tells us that being a foot washer is a very weak position in the chaos of the world which values strength and wealth, while Jesus teaches us that we are all called to be foot washers and servants to the people around us. The world tells us to make sure ourselves, our families, and our friends should get the lion's share of our feast, while Jesus is whispering to us that we are called to feed the hungry stranger, clothe the naked, give to the poor, and lift the very people that despise us.

So, I truly believe that it is a good thing when Jesus shows us a bare cupboard where the cannisters are empty, the jars depleted, the sacks something to be discarded, and there only remains the slimmest of possibilities of making one last meal before we die. Where Jesus allows us to understand his message to the point that when we make that last meal, it could be a meal that we give to someone else. As Jesus gave his all, every last drop of blood and grace, for us who are so undeserving of such a sacrifice. He teaches us that he expects the same thing from us, not for a heavenly reward, but because we are his brothers and sisters and should be trying to live as he lived. But we don't want to hear that. While the world is shouting, Jesus is whispering. While the world beats us silly with a stick, Jesus binds and heals our wounds.

We don't want to hear that we may be asked to give up the last of our cupboard to someone that we don't even know, or we believe to be unworthy, never taking the time to realize that it was never ours to begin with. That Jesus

filled our cupboard through his love and grace for us, a cupboard of abundance created as his blood drained into the sand on a cross at Calvary.

If we choose to depend on our own ability to fill our cupboards, we will ultimately face the moment when those cupboards can no longer sustain us. At that moment we might just find enough flour and oil to make one last loaf of bread and then die. We will die with our cupboards completely bare, our resources depleted, never realizing or accepting that we could have lived in the grace of Jesus Christ, whom we claim to be our savior and who promises us that he will provide all that we need. All we need to do is put our lives totally in his gracious and loving hands, recognizing him as our brother, our savior, our reconciler, our counselor, and voice that whispers in our ears out of the darkness. The vindicator of our souls and the light that dispels the shadows.

Are we willing to look where Jesus tells us to look? Are we willing to let him fulfill our needs? Are we willing to let him use us to fulfill the needs of complete strangers? Are we willing to break back the burned-out bark of what we see as worthless to reveal the abundance that God has waiting for us?

This week, the beginning of the season of Lent, I want us to take the time to look at our cupboards. Are our cupboards filled with what we think we need to survive the chaos around us? Or are our cupboards filled with the things God provides, knowing that he understands better we do, what we need? And, if we have never done it, are we willing to turn our pantries over to Jesus and just let him handle the inventory from here on out, listening to God's whisper as he guides our paths to those so in need of his grace?

**How can we fulfill the purpose that God has set for us if we are always staring at and trying to expand our cupboards? How can we fulfill our purpose if we allow the world to determine what's in our pantry and our canisters? In truth, we can't. Doing so forces us to keep one foot firmly planted in this world which was never the intent of Christ. We either belong to him, or don't. There really isn't any in between.**

**I ask that we all seek the abundance that Christ offers knowing that his water never runs dry and his bread is the bread of life for us all.**

**God bless you all!**

**AMEN**

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