

**4 October 2020**

**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: 2 Kings 4:1-7

Hymn: CH4 153 Great is Thy faithfulness

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**PRAYER**

Lord God, faithful and loving,  
we do not always feel like rejoicing.  
Even as we gather to worship you,  
our minds are sometimes distracted and elsewhere,  
weighed down by the burdens of our lives.  
Help us, in this moment, to find it within our hearts  
to REJOICE in your constancy and loving care for us.

Lord God, we never know what the future holds or where life will take us  
next.

We never know what is just around the corner and what the outcomes of  
things will be.

But we know that whatever follows on from this moment, you are here  
with us, by our side, above and beneath us, entwining your life with ours,  
surpassing all human understanding.

In this moment, bless us and awaken us to your abiding presence; and  
forgive us for our doubts, fears and transgressions...

*We ask this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray:*

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come  
Thy will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our debts  
As we forgive our debtors  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever  
Amen

## **READING**

### **2 Kings 4:1-7**

The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”

<sup>2</sup> Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?”

“Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a small jar of olive oil.”

<sup>3</sup> Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbours for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. <sup>4</sup> Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”

<sup>5</sup> She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. <sup>6</sup> When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.”

But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.

<sup>7</sup> She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”

## **MESSAGE**

Have you ever thought: “I don’t have what it takes to get through this?”

Have you ever felt so completely empty that you had no idea how you would be able to face another day?

Have you ever said to yourself: “If I just had more time, more money, more self-confidence, better ideas, better opportunities; if I was just a little younger, a little older, a little wiser... THEN I would be able to “*be* the change I want to see in the world.”

Sometimes, our problems feel so big, and we feel so small.

But if there is one thing coping with Covid19 has taught us, it is that anything is possible.

I’m quite sure none of us could ever imagine living through a stranger time than we are at the moment – yet, it’s happening.

I think that when the lockdown was first announced most people thought that they would never be able to cope with it – yet, although it’s sometimes very hard, we are living through this as best we can.

Our lives might have changed, dramatically, but we are still here.

We probably all kept our fingers crossed that the lockdown restrictions wouldn't get tightened, but... it did. And actually, this time round, we know a little better how to deal with it, because we've done it before! And yet – I am sure there a quite a lot of people sighing, wondering how long this is going to go on for; how on earth will they be able to get through this...

Never-mind make a difference in the world!

Well, I think the answer to this very tricky question, is to be found in the story we read from the Old Testament today.

Let's go have a look at what happened there...

A widow went to the prophet of God, the person who represented God among his people on earth, and said, with more than a little accusation in her voice, that although her husband was a faithful servant of God, he is dead now, and his creditor wants to take her 2 sons as slaves.

All that was quite legitimate in Old Testament times. If you couldn't pay your debt, you had to work as a slave for 7 years. And if you were not alive to do that, your sons had to.

The tricky thing is that in that society, a family needed a man to be able to survive. A widow couldn't fend for herself, she wasn't allowed to go out and work, and if her sons were taken away from her, she would have no future at all, because at least sons could look after their mother when they were old enough.

So she, very boldly, does the only thing she can – she goes to the man of God, because God was believed to be a ‘Father to the orphans’ and the ‘Defender of the widows’.

Elisha, God’s prophet, is happy to try and help her. He asks her what she has in her house. Immediately she responds: “Nothing.”

That’s how bad things were for this woman and her 2 boys. She had NOTHING. But then she thinks a little and says that actually, she does have *something* – a little oil. She almost didn’t even mention it – I mean, what can you do with a little oil?

But that’s all God needed. She might not have realised it straight away, but she DID have *something*.

So Elisha told her to ask her neighbours for empty jars.

The jars were big and made out of clay. The oil would have been stored in the large jars, and then it would have been scooped or poured out into a wee jar to be used.

Olive oil was very valuable in those days, it was even sometimes described as “liquid gold”. And that is because it was used for so many different things: cooking, lighting, cosmetics, medicine, and for anointing prophets and kings.

So the widow was told to ask all her neighbours for empty jars. And to then pour the oil in these jars, behind closed doors.

Quite a bizarre command, don't you think? But she didn't even hesitate for a minute. It might not have made any sense at all, but she trusted God with all her heart.

The oil kept flowing and flowing until the last of the jars were filled. And then it stopped.

Can you imagine what would have happened if she only borrowed a couple of jars, and then tried getting more later? She wouldn't have had nearly as much oil as she had now.

Now she had enough oil to sell to pay all her husband's debt, and to live off the rest.

A miracle. But a miracle that could have turned out differently if she didn't do her part.

She had to use what she had, and then God did the rest.

And I think the very same is true for us.

How will we be able to cope with our current situation?

We need to:

- Start where we are;
- Use what we have;
- Do what we can.

That's all we *can* do, really.

If this widow felt sorry for herself about the difficult situation she was in, through no fault of her own, and she just sat there and wept – her sons would have been taken away into slavery, and what would have become of her? She wouldn't have anybody to look out for her, and she didn't even have anything to eat in her house!

But she took that first step. Because she knew she didn't have a choice. And once she took that step, her faith in God carried her all the way to the top. What looked like an impossible task, became possible, because of her faith, obedience and trust.

It might be Covid19, it might be your health, it might be your relationships, it might be a bereavement, it might be your mental state, it might be your finances... Whatever is going on in your life that makes you look around you and feel as if you have nothing left, don't despair.

Because you *don't* have nothing. You *will* have a little "oil" somewhere.

What is your "oil"?

Kindness, compassion, time, patience, a listening ear, a helping hand, the ability to pray for others, a practical, problem solving attitude...

Whatever it is – take that, take what you have to God, use it in the way he tells you to, and see the miracle happen!

God doesn't expect us to change the world all by ourselves. He knows that we can feel down, devastated and even desperate more often than not these days.

But let's get up and use what we have:

- To get through the day, and
- To make a difference in the world.

And then, let's allow God to do the rest.

We might live in a world where things don't always go right, but we believe in a God who can do absolutely anything.

So let's not wish we were different, or had different things, or even lived in a different time. We are all here *now* for a reason.

Me might be finding ourselves in a very complicated time, but God's message to us is very simple.

Take a good look at your life this morning – take note of what you have – and use it. What you have is *all* you need to make a start. And through you, through all of us together, God will make this difficult time bearable.

Let's glorify his name for that!

Amen

**Amen.**

**HYMN**

**CH4 153:1-3**

"Great is Thy faithfulness, " O God my Father,  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not  
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.  
*"Great is Thy faithfulness!" "Great is Thy faithfulness!"*  
*Morning by morning new mercies I see;*  
*All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—*  
*"Great is Thy faithfulness, " Lord, unto me!*

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,  
Join with all nature in manifold witness  
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.  
*"Great is Thy faithfulness!" "Great is Thy faithfulness!"*  
*Morning by morning new mercies I see;*  
*All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—*  
*"Great is Thy faithfulness, " Lord, unto me!*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!  
*"Great is Thy faithfulness!" "Great is Thy faithfulness!"*  
*Morning by morning new mercies I see;*  
*All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—*  
*"Great is Thy faithfulness, " Lord, unto me!*