

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
November 10, 2024  
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft  
**Am I giving enough?**

Jennifer comes to a stop at the corner of 40<sup>th</sup> and Southern. There is a group again. They have a picture of a child who they claim is in the hospital. As they walk from car to car, she just tries to look forward and ignore them. Yet, the question still tugs at her heart strings.

Matt walks past the tents on his way back to his car after taking his kids to a Suns game. He just spent hundreds of dollars for a fun experience. Now, he sees people who don't even have enough money for a home. He tries to walk fast and walk passed, but the question tugs at his heart strings.

As the plates are passed through the sanctuary, Melissa can't stop the feeling of guilt from being passed to her as well. Although she and her husband sat down and set the amount that was right for them to give and it is pulled from their bank account twice per month, this question still tugs at her heart strings.

What is the question that is coming to all of these people? The question is am I giving enough? Perhaps this is a question that you have asked before. Am I giving enough money to the church? Am I giving enough money to the poor? Am I giving enough money to various causes that are important to my faith and worldview?

Now, perhaps this is not a question that you consider very often. If not, there may be an issue at hand. Perhaps you drive by the people asking for donations. Perhaps you ignore the prompts at Walgreens to round up to the nearest dollar. Perhaps you don't care about what you are putting in the offering plate. I will not spend too much time getting into the reason behind why that would be an issue because it is fairly straight forward. Christians desire to be generous motivated by the generosity that God has shown toward them.

In this life, it is going to be a common question for Christians to consider. Maybe the reason is guilt. Maybe the reason is a genuine desire to give more in response to how much God has given to us in sending Jesus to save us. Either way, you might be confronted with the question, am I giving enough?

To address such a concern, we can go to God's Word for guidance. As it is written in Psalm 119:105, "Your words are a lamp for my feet and a light for my path." (EHV) God's Word is good and useful in helping us find resolution to such questions about our lives as his people. Today, we can go to the account of the Widow of Zarephath. We can use her example to scrutinize our lives. Are we giving in a way that is fitting with how God has called us to give? So, let's dig into this text of Scripture.

First, let's put the Widow of Zarephath's actions into context. She lived in a time in which God was disciplining Israel by withholding rain from their land. The rain would return when the Lord's prophet Elijah spoke the word. During this time of famine, the LORD continued to provide for his prophet, Elijah. First, God called Elijah to go stay by the Kerith Ravine where he could drink from the stream and the ravens would bring him food. When the stream dried up because of the lack of rain, God sent the prophet Elijah to go to this Widow of Zarephath.

When Elijah is sent to go to this Widow in Zarephath, he is told that the LORD has commanded her to provide for him. I believe this is a very important note to consider. The LORD has commanded her to provide for Elijah. She had a calling from the LORD. She had a vocation. She was to provide for God's prophet. When we consider the Widow of Zarephath providing for Elijah this is not some random act of generosity. Instead, this is vocational service. God had put a person in front of her to serve. God had given her an opportunity to be generous. Not only was it an opportunity though; he had called her to do it.

When Elijah the prophet arrived at the city gate, he saw the widow gathering sticks. This is the woman that God had called to vocationally serve by giving to him. Having seen the widow, Elijah calls to her

asking her to give him some water to drink. As she was getting him some water, he added to the request asking for some bread to eat.

The widow's response to Elijah was that she did not have enough to give to him. In fact, she did not have enough for her son and herself to survive. They planned on simply taking the handful of flour that they had and the little bit of oil to prepare some food; then they would die.

The widow's response makes me wonder how the LORD had commanded her to provide for Elijah the prophet. Did God speak to her directly? Did God come to her and tell her that he was sending his prophet her way and it would be her job to provide for him? If so, why didn't she want to do it? Did she not trust in God? Perhaps, God had called her out to do this for Elijah and she was not yet aware. Maybe the command to do so was not directly given to her. I can't say for sure what the reason for her question was. Either way, her response and tone changes after the Word from the prophet had come to her.

Elijah, a prophet of the LORD, responds to her response of fear and despair by speaking confidence from God to her. He tells her, "Do not be afraid." What a comforting message that is when it comes through God's means of communication. She did not need to fear. The LORD Elijah's God was also the LORD her God.

Elijah's message for her continues, he gives the reason as to why she did not need to fear. God would perform a miracle in their midst. The jar of flour would not run out and neither would the pitcher of oil. These would continue to provide for Elijah, the widow, and her household until the rain returned.

God's gracious proclamation that came to the widow through the prophet moves her to follow through on the LORD's instructions. She goes to take the only food that she had and gives it to the LORD's prophet. God had called this widow in this way. He empowered her to follow through on the service. He sustained her in order to continue the service. I wonder what that was like. What was it like to have the food not disappear? It was probably an amazing experience. God provided for her this opportunity to provide for others.

The widow wasn't really the person providing for Elijah. The LORD was providing for Elijah. In this case, he did so miraculously. In a way, God was actually providing for the widow in a way that was beyond food. He gave an opportunity for meaningful service to her. God gave her the opportunity to give to others.

Let's loop back to the question of am I giving enough? The Widow of Zarephath gave all that she had. Well, at least in an earthly sense that is what she did. She had confidence through the LORD however that what could be seen by the eyes was not truly all that she had.

In all reality, this woman did not give that much. She just gave a little bit of food. She just kept giving a little bit of food. The character of how she gave is really the important aspect to focus on here. She gave in faith. Every single day, she would move forward in faith that this was not the day that the food would run out. She gave trusting God according to his promise. She also gave in accordance to her vocation in response to God's gifts. The God of free and flowing grace had shown wonderful kindness to her. In a time of famine, he promised to continue to provide for her. He also provided her with an avenue to show her thankfulness to him. The LORD had called her to service in this new vocation. What made the Widow of Zarephath's giving so exemplary? She gave in faith in the LORD's promises according to his calling.

Brothers and sisters, consider the question am I giving enough? Are you always giving cheerfully from everything according to the LORD's command? No, I am sure you are not. I am not as well. When we use God's Word as a guide for Christian living, it operates as a mirror still. God's law shows us that we are sinning. We often do not give as the widow gave. If we fail to give as God has called us to just one time, we are failing to live the perfect life that he commands. Yet, the problem is deeper. We often can be selfish. We ignore the opportunities to serve others. We hold back our generosity so that we can serve ourselves. If your question is am I giving enough? The answer should rightly be no. You have not always

given all of yourself for service to the LORD by serving your neighbor. Sometimes, this has nothing to do with how much money you are giving.

Jesus, however, did give enough for you. Seeing Elijah go up to the Widow of Zarephath to ask for some water causes me to remember a time that Jesus approached a woman to ask for some water. Jesus used this as an opportunity to tell her about all that he gives. Jesus Christ gave it all for everyone. Jesus provides the forgiveness of sins and perfection that we need. Jesus gave his life for us. He did not just give gold and silver, but he gave his innocent suffering and death. Like Jesus said to the woman at the well, he is the water that does not dry up. Jesus keeps giving. He gives unto eternal life.

The Widow of Zarephath was able to give as the LORD called her to do because of God's sustaining promise to continue to provide bread and oil for her. You are able to give as the LORD calls you to do because of God's promise to continue to sustain you through Jesus, the everlasting bread and living water. The grace of God in Christ Jesus moves you to give. When you give moved by his grace that is more than enough.

Practically speaking, how can you answer the question am I giving enough? Make sure you are addressing the question from the right perspective. This is not about percentage given to this or that organization. This is about a whole life stewardship. Moved by the grace that God has shown you in Christ Jesus, you can give all your time, all your talents, and all your treasures in service to him. Perhaps 10, 15, or 5 percent of your salary is going to the church for God's mission. Yet, 100 percent of your salary is used to glorify the God who has so graciously given to you. Maybe you will give 10 hours per week to serve the church, but you can give 168 hours a week to glorify and thank our God.

Am I giving enough? That is not even the right question to ask. Moved by the grace of God shown us in Christ Jesus the question can be: can I use this dollar, moment, or opportunity to glorify and thank my God? Then follow it up with a second question, how? Amen.