

God of “more than enough,” and so he wants the widow to gather all the jars she can scrounge.

And what happens? God delivers! The widow begins pouring the oil into the first jar, and when it is full she sets it aside. In the mad scramble to fill the jars and not spill any of the precious liquid, she moves on to the second jar, and the third jar, and the fourth jar, and the fifth jar until all are filled and her son says to her, “There is not a jar left!” Then and only then, when all the jars are filled, did the oil stop flowing. The oil didn’t run out; there were simply no more jars to hold oil. God’s miracle didn’t run dry: the oil stopped when there were no more vessels to hold it. God provided more than enough, and would have provided even more, but there were no more jars.

Do you see what I’m driving at? God’s abundance never ends; it is only our ability to receive God’s abundance that is limited. The oil didn’t stop because God had no more desire or ability or oil to give; the oil stopped because the widow had no more ability to receive it. God is always able to give more, but we are not always able to receive it all. It’s important for us to realize that we have the capacity to stop God from working in our lives. We have the ability to shut down the flow of God’s grace and abundance. We have the power to limit the work of God’s kingdom in the world.

The widow almost frustrated God’s attempt to help her because she thought she had nothing in the house to offer God to use. “Your servant has nothing there at all...except a little oil.” Nothing...except. A little oil in the hands of our God can turn out to be an awful lot. At the end of the story, Elisha tells the widow, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.” God provided enough oil for the widow and her sons to pay off her debts, with enough left over for her to live out her days in relative peace and comfort.

Today we’re beginning a series of sermons on stewardship, but this year I want us to think about our giving differently. Stewardship should not be about line items on the budget, or how much it costs to keep the lights on and the heat running, or where can we cut costs to save a few pennies. I want us to think, instead, of our giving as part of our walk with God. If we claim to be disciples of Jesus, then giving becomes one avenue through which we express our discipleship. If we claim to serve the God of abundance, then our giving expresses that belief. If we claim to be citizens of the kingdom of God, then our giving expresses our desire to see things on earth become as they are in heaven.

The simple fact is that everyone has something to offer. Let me say it again: everyone has something to offer. The bills may be numerous, the jobs may be scarce, the 401K may be underperforming, the car may be leaking something noxious, the kids may need braces, the creditors may be calling, the price of gas or milk or bread may be rising...but you still have something in your house to offer God. Even if it’s just a little oil.

Do you have a kitchen table? Then gather your family for a meal, say grace, and talk about your day. You just gave God your time for prayer and fellowship. Do you have a life insurance policy laying in a drawer? Make the church one of the beneficiaries. You just gave God’s ministry here at Federated a boost. Do you have a few minutes at one end of the day? Read a Bible story or share a devotion with your kids. You just gave God praise.

Of course, when we think of stewardship campaigns our first thought is always money. And money is important. We need money to pay staff, to keep our grand old building in good shape, to spend on missions, to purchase supplies, and to keep the heat and lights on. But if we only think about giving in terms of money, then we are selling ourselves short, and we’re selling God short, too.

Our walk of faith includes so much more than money: it includes BELIEF. We must sincerely believe, as Elisha did, that our God is a God of abundance and that our God can do more with what we have than we can ask or imagine. It means believing that our contribution of time, talent or treasure – big or small – can make a difference in the hands of our Bountiful God.

Our walk of faith also includes ACTION: we must act on our beliefs, as the widow did by gathering the jars and pouring the oil. We must make a commitment to God's kingdom by giving of ourselves, with whatever we have to give: serving a meal, weeding a flower bed, attending to a child, teaching a class, folding a newsletter, singing a song, visiting a friend, writing a card, or writing a check. Faith is belief in action.

When we limit our walk of faith by not offering what we have, we rob the kingdom of God. When we limit our walk of faith by not offering what we have, we rob the Church of opportunities to change the world. When we limit our walk of faith by not offering what we have, we rob ourselves of the chance to serve God's kingdom on earth.

What have you got on your house? Nothing, except a little oil. There is more in your house than you realize. There is more in your life than you realize. Whatever you have, let God. Whatever you have, let God use it. Whatever it is, offer it up and see what God can make of it. A little is much when God is in it.

What Have You Got in Your House?

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The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

2 Kings 4:1-7

What have you got in your house? It sounds like such a simple, straightforward question. But in the story of Elisha and the widow, that question is all the opening God needs to do something truly amazing. The widow appeals to Elisha for help. Her husband is dead and the family owes money. Now the creditors are coming and they will take anything and everything they can – even the widow's two sons if they have to – to settle the debt. Elisha asks her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what have you got in your house?" And she answers, "Your servant has nothing there at all...except a little oil."

Nothing...except a little oil. "Nothing...except" – which means she has something. By failing to see what she does have, the widow sells herself short. What's worse, she sells God short. Granted, her straits are dire, her circumstances mean, her assets meager; but she does have something: a little oil. The Bible is brimming with stories of God's making much from little: Gideon's army is reduced to 300 men, and God uses them to defeat the Midianite hoards (Judges 7); God uses little David and his five smooth stones to bring down the mighty Goliath (1 Sam. 17); Jesus uses a boy's lunch to feed 5,000 people (Matt. 14).

In the hands of our God, even a little can be a lot. Elisha instructs the widow to go and collect all the jars she can from her neighbors. He specifically says to her, "Don't ask for just a few." Elisha doesn't want the widow to sell God short, because Elisha knows that we serve a God of abundance. Elisha knows that God always intends to do more than we ask or imagine. Elisha knows that our God is the