

Ryan just wanted to help. He succeeded, not because he was rich or famous, but because he believed it possible for one person to make a difference. Even when the price of a well jumped from \$70 to \$2,000 Ryan wasn't deterred: he just worked harder. He didn't believe those who told him his dream was impossible. Ryan lived free from impossibility.

Our readings today both teach us about living free from impossibility. There is a famine in the land and the widow from Zarephath is destitute: she and her son have no food left in the house. So, when she meets the prophet Elijah, who asks her for some bread to eat, she replies that she has no bread. So, too, in Matthew's story, a crowd of 5,000 men gathers to learn from Jesus. Now remember, they only counted the men: add in the women and children and the crowd could have topped 20,000 or more! Now it's the end of a long day and the people are tired. They are also hungry. The disciples make Jesus aware of the need, and he says to them: *You give them something to eat* (Matt. 14:16). The widow cannot feed the prophet. The disciples cannot feed 20,000 people. There is great need here.

There is also great doubt. The widow explains to Elijah that she has only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil (1 Kings 17:12). The disciples explain to Jesus that they have only five loaves of bread and two fish. Did you catch the word of doubt? "Only!" The widow has "only" a handful of flour and "only" a little oil. The disciples have "only" five loaves of bread and "only" two fish. The doubt creeps in because they think that "only" is too little for God to use. The doubt stems from relying on a limited human view of what's possible without considering what God can do.

But Elijah and Jesus know better. Elijah tells the woman to make him a small loaf of bread using what little flour and oil she has left. Elijah tells the widow that *'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.'* The widow does as Elijah directs and, miracle of miracles, the flour does not run out and the jar of oil does not run dry, just as God promised. Likewise, Jesus tells the disciples to bring what they have. He blesses it, he breaks the bread, and he shares it with the people, and, miracle of miracles, no one goes hungry! There are even twelve baskets of leftovers. In the face of great need, despite great doubt, our great God delivers! What seems impossible for us is always possible for God.

Living free from impossibility is a lesson we still need to learn. Even with the testimony of the widow from Zarephath and the disciples of Jesus, we still doubt that God can deliver. We can't afford to be a tithing church because we only have a limited budget. We can't help at the Salvation Army because we're only one church: it's more than we can handle. We can't provide care boxes to all the cancer patients at Lake Region because it's only a token gesture in the fight against cancer. And we can't do those things if we're only relying on our own ingenuity; but if we would only believe that God is part of the equation and if we would only trust God to multiply our efforts, we can do great things.

The fact is that we can do a lot more than we think we can do if we trust God to take what we have to offer and make it into something great. We are on our way to becoming a tithing church: in the past few years we've raised our benevolence giving from 5% to 8% of our budget. Not ten percent yet, but well on our way. And we did more than help at the Salvation Army: we rolled up our sleeves, cooked and cleaned, and by our example inspired 17 other churches and 9 businesses to give money and donate time (and there was money left over!). And although we haven't cured cancer, we have made the treatments a little easier for patients to bear. With God all things are possible.

If we live free from impossibility, we live free for the power of God to do amazing things. What our generosity begins, God will make miraculous. When the widow offered her flour and oil, God did a miraculous thing. When the disciples brought the five loaves and two fish, God did a miraculous thing. When we fail to give because we have only a little, we rob God of the opportunity to show off in a big way. When we think only about what we can do, we reveal how little we think of God and God's abilities. In the hands of a great God, a little can go a long way, and a handful of flour can make a year's worth of bread, and a few fish can feed thousands.

We have a great God who continues to meet great need in the face of great doubt. When we were dead to sin, being only human and unable to save ourselves, God sent Jesus to die on the cross for us. Our great God took his life, freely given, and made of it something miraculous: *By his stripes we are healed* (Isaiah 53:5). By his death and resurrection is the whole world put right.

We have only our lives, our hands, our mouths, and our hearts to give to God; but with these humble things God can do amazing, miraculous, and transformational things. As we

celebrate World Communion Sunday with our Christian brothers and Sisters around the world today, we rejoice that in and through us – and only us - God can do marvelous things. So bring your life, be it big or small, and God will make it miraculous. Bring your abilities, be they mighty or humble, and God will do extraordinary things with them. Bring your gifts, be they large donations or commitments of time, and God will multiply them.

Brothers Henry and Richard Blackaby tell us:

"Don't discount what is possible with God (Philippians 4:13). When God gives an assignment, it is no longer an impossibility, but rather it is an absolute certainty. When God gives you a seemingly impossible task, the only thing preventing it from coming to pass is your disobedience... How do you respond to assignments that seem impossible? Do you write them off as unattainable? Or do you immediately adjust your life to God's revelation, watching with anticipation to see how [God] will accomplish [God's] purposes through your obedience. God wants to do the impossible through your life."

Live free from impossibility, and live for the power of God. Free yourselves from thinking that “only” is all there is, and free yourselves for the wondrous way God works in the world. And remember that God works, first and foremost, through you. What our generosity begins, God will make miraculous. Bring only what you’ve got; trust God to do the rest.

Prayer: Dear Lord, today I am reminded that I am to pray even for that which seems impossible. I ask for such things, not because they seem likely, but because of who you are. I pray because you are good and wise and merciful and powerful. You can do the impossible, or that which seems impossible to me, at any rate. Nothing is impossible for you. Help me, Lord, to trust you with everything in life. Give me courage to ask for big things, impossible things. May I pray, not on the basis of what is likely, but on the basis of your character. Amen.

Freedom From Impossibility

Sunday, October 4, 2015

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

1 Kings 17:7-16

Matthew 14:13-21

Ryan Hreljac of Kemptville, Ontario was just 6 years old when his first grade teacher told him about the need for clean water wells in Africa. Inspired to help, Ryan set out to raise the \$70 his fact sheet said it would cost to build a well in Uganda. He did extra chores like yard work and washing windows; he vacuumed, too, although he admits that was his least favorite job. In a few months Ryan had his \$70. His parents contacted a non-profit group called “Watercan” which facilitates well-drilling in Africa. When the group’s directors met with Ryan, they explained to him that the actual cost of a well was \$2,000, not \$70. Ryan’s response? “That’s okay. I’ll just do more chores.”

Ryan did more chores and raised more money. The local newspaper heard about his effort and spread the word. Email sent Ryan’s story across the globe. Reporters interviewed Ryan, something he endured, he said, because “every time I do this it gets more money for the people in Uganda.” All of Ryan’s efforts paid off. Donations started to pour in. In 10-months, Ryan had the \$2,000 he needed to drill a well.

In 1999, workers drilled the first of Ryan’s Wells at the Angolo Primary School in northern Uganda. Since then, Ryan’s Foundation, “Ryans’ Well” (www.ryanswell.ca), claims over \$800,000 in donations – enough to drill 400 wells. Ryan, now 21 and attending college, is still speaking and raising money to provide clean water for the people of Uganda. What Ryan started with \$70 has blossomed into a worldwide movement.

Once asked what he would say to the world if he had its attention for five minutes, Ryan answered: “I would tell everyone to believe in their dreams. If you do, you can accomplish anything.”