

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

What an underwhelming last meal. If I were on death row, I'd be asking for pizza and burgers and fries. I'd want grease and fat and sugar and salt and spice. I'd want the most unhealthy buffet and the fanciest plated gourmet food all at the same time. Not some dry and crumbly unleavened bread.

But I suppose the widow didn't have much choice. Not in her meal nor in the death sentence. She was on the last legs of a death sentence by famine that she hadn't really earned for herself—we know that the famine is a judgment on the evil line of kings, but she, she just saw drought and famine surrounding her. The land was dying, and in due time, so would she and her child. And so, just to use up the last of what she has, just to see their lives until the end, she was throwing together all that she could make, and then they'd just wait.

This is what she's preparing for when all of a sudden, this stranger popped up and asks for some water. "Some what? Where on earth would we get you some water to spare, sir?" They're living in a drought (little does she know it all started with this very stranger opening his fat mouth). He would dare ask for some water. And not just that, but he wants to partake in that which was supposed to be their last meal. If she gave into that, it meant she had already had her last meal and she didn't even stop to savour the crumbs.

"As sure as your God lives" she vows "I don't have enough to share. I promise, I'm not hoarding a secret stock pile. I'm not even refusing to give you our left overs. I've got nothing else." And as far as she knows, she's not wrong. She's watched the skies as rain didn't fall. She's watched the ground as crops didn't grow. She's watched her and her son shrink to skin and

bones and felt her tongue stick to the roof of her mouth. “As sure as your god lives, whoever he is, I promise you, I’ve got nothing.”

But she doesn’t know Elijah’s God. She doesn’t know that this God lives because He is the source and the cause of all life. She doesn’t recognize that her very existence is because of His speaking and weaving and care. But even though she doesn’t know this, Elijah promises that her tiny gift to him would not leave her family wanting, but instead would be met by God’s faithfulness. “As sure as *my* God lives,” Elijah might say “you will not run out of oil nor flour until rain once again falls. Do. Not. Fear.”

Elijah’s assurance stirs up faithfulness in her, and God does not fall down on His promise. The three of them live, well fed amidst the drought. They live for 3 years sidestepping death by famine, the death which would have torn through the nation surrounding them. They were sustained by the hand of the Lord until death came by other means.

God had protected them from death just long enough for death to find them another way. Just following our reading today, the widow’s son dies. She blames Elijah, acknowledging that he’s working for God, acknowledging the power of God and associating this death of her son with her sin. She pictures Elijah and God working together to play the long game—as if God had said “make it look like I care for them. Make her think that I’ll provide for them, and then, just when they’re comfortable, I’ll divide the ‘them’ and she’ll have to endure his death on her own.”

This is certainly not the case. At least not for Elijah. He has compassion on the woman, seeing her loneliness and her fear, her awareness of just how much more helpless she is now that she is without a son to care for her. And Elijah knows that this is not who His God is—

though He recognizes that God has “brought calamity” this does not mean that He willed it or caused it, and even if those are the cases, He still remains a God of mercy, so “please,” he prays, “have mercy.”

And sure enough, the Lord listens. Elijah had not, after all, simply been an instrument of God to prolong their death sentence but was there to give life. By the Word and power of God, Elijah had provided over the years sustenance for their days and, by praying and laying over the child 3 times, he brought back life to the boy. In the middle of death, God provided life.

Though their situation seems a little extreme and much more dramatic than many of our days, you and I live in similar circumstances.

First of all, we are surrounded by death. Since the fall of man, creation has been dying, and mankind following suit. Each day could contain our last meal, and while very few of us only have a palm full of flour to make a dry cake with, even eating the best roast and the creamiest of mashed potatoes doesn't make a last meal much more palatable.

Our lives would be a futile attempt at enjoying whatever unknown amount of time we have, but thanks be to God life has been brought near to us. As sure as our God lives, the death and resurrection of Christ have proven that death is not the end.

Death was the consequence of the injustice, idolatry, and pure evil of the kings of Israel, and so the land suffered death for their sins. The same thing is true of humanity. Because we have sinned, death is our just reward. But just as God provided a system of sacrifice to atone, to forgive the Israelites for their sin, God provided one final, pure, eternal sacrifice to do away with the Sin of humanity.

Just as the boy died as the result of Sin, so did Christ; He died as a result of *our* sin. And Christ's 3 days in the tomb were prefigured by the 3 lay-downs of Elijah over the boy. Christ, by His own power and by the power of the Father, rose from the dead, and unlike the widow's son, He will never die again. Yes, Christ arose with death satisfied, its stomach satiated, and the confidence of the ticking death clock was undermined; it no longer had the final say.

And for you and me, so that we wouldn't doubt that *our own* death was defeated, we have already been carried through death in our baptism. Just as Elijah carried the son through death, bringing him out on the other side, so do you and I arise from our watery graves, alive and kicking in the arms of Christ.

And much like the son, the widow, and even Elijah himself were provided with food by the miraculous work of God, we are provided by God eternally. Because Christ freely gave his last morsel of life for us, much like the widow did after some convincing, we receive life, day after day, from our God, as sure as He lives. By the sleep we get and the food we eat and especially through the body and blood of Christ we partake in, we receive His life.

And so we live. We live between deaths, the first in our baptism, the second in that moment when breath ceases to move in and out of our lungs, whenever that may be. But in between those two moments, we Live. With a capital L. More than those around us whose lives *look* like ours, running errands and working and doing good and evil and sleeping, we do all that plus more. We daily die in repentance, looking away from what we have done and what we can do and instead looking to Christ, and in looking to Him, we rise in Christ. We now pay the grocer in Christ and play with friend on the playground in Christ and fill up the gas tank in Christ and

parent in Christ. Everything that we do is Living, capital L, and because of His sacrifice, His death and resurrection, we live freely.

So we don't need to worry about tomorrow because our death has been dealt with, the ticking clock jammed, now we are always living in Christ's death and His life. So the life we've been given is free, free for us to enjoy, free for us to cherish, and free for us to give.

This means that we are free to give like the widows of today's lessons. We can give, even of our last portions, our last meals or two pennies, sure that God is still living. He is still our God, and we are still His beloved, those whom He will care for.

But this also means that we don't *have* to give everything. We don't need to save the Church or the salvation army or a hospital by giving everything away as if God is looking, watching, and waiting...to see if we'll act righteously. No one is counting to see what portion of your income you give, whether it's more or less than the couple down the isle. I mean, we do have people who count and deposit the money, but they aren't going to like you more or less depending on how you give. You're free to cherish the life you've been given and you're free to give joyfully of your time and money and talents. To cherish and give, for the Christian will be so intermingled that you can't even tell them apart.

The issues are when we make an idol out of our money, when we trust in our resources rather than the God who graciously gave us our resources. When we fear that they will run out and we will be left wanting, or when we turn to them in our abundance to provide what God should, we've got to watch out.

If we are hoarding our money because it is our lifeline, then you've got an idol. You're looking at something created to care for you. Repent and learn that God, because of Christ, is the one who cares for you.

And if you're giving because it makes you feel special, then stop. Immediately. If you're getting satisfaction from the looks you get from another person because of how much you can afford to give, then it is an idol, it is self-intoxication. You've now found your value in something other than who you are in Christ. And in fact, it could all be gone in a moment, but God is still there, so you too, repent.

The reality is, we've all got to support the church. But not because God is watching, nor because others are watching. We give to the Church to support her mission, the mission which has brought us our freedom in Christ. And out of that freedom we give of ourselves freely. In Christ we are free to enjoy and give and love and live.

Even in the midst of the death around us, He has won life for you. He will sustain it, do not fear. Do not look at the life you've given to sustain you or give you value, but instead turn to the one who provides life itself for you. As long as your God lives, and be assured that He is life itself, He has taken care of your sin and salvation and satiated your needs today, and these truths will continue to be true tomorrow and for every tomorrow you ever have.

Amen.

And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds on Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.