

I Kings 17:8-16
February 3, '19

“A PIECE OF CAKE”

**SERMON TITLES SOMETIMES POSE
DIFFICULTY FOR ME.**

**I’LL NEVER FORGET THE COMMENT A
COLLEGE STUDENT MADE TO ME MANY YEARS
AGO ABOUT SERMON TITLES.**

**I ASKED HER WHAT SHE LOOKED FOR IN A
SERMON & ALSO WHAT SHE HOPED *NOT* TO HEAR
IN A SERMON.**

**IT WAS HER RESPONSE TO THE LATTER THAT I
REMEMBER MOST CLEARLY.**

**SHE SAID *“I HATE IT WHEN A SERMON HAS A
TITLE & THERE’S NEVER ANY REFERENCE TO THE
TITLE UNTIL THE VERY LAST WORDS OF THE
SERMON – AS IF THE PREACHER REALIZES HE HAS***

***TO DO SOMETHING WITH IT & JUST STICKS IN A LINE
TO VALIDATE THE TITLE.”***

**I FREQUENTLY THINK OF THAT COMMENT
WHEN DETERMINING A SERMON’S TITLE.**

**ONE OF THE DIFFICULTIES A SERMON TITLE
GIVES ME IS THAT I ENJOY SERMON TITLES THAT
ARE CLEVER & WITTY & SINCE I’VE NEVER BEEN
ACCUSED AS BEING EITHER, NEITHER ARE MY
SERMON TITLES!**

**PERHAPS THAT’S THE REASON THAT MY FIRST
INSTINCT IN CREATING A SERMON TITLE IS TO
LOOK TO SCRIPTURE ITSELF.**

**I THINK THE BEST SERMON TITLES ARE THOSE
THAT UTILIZE THE VERY WORDS OF THE PASSAGE
THAT IS BEING PREACHED.**

THE GREAT 20TH CENTURY THEOLOGIAN KARL BARTH WAS A MASTER AT THIS.

IN FACT, MY ALL-TIME FAVORITE SERMON TITLE IS BARTH’S CHRISTMAS SERMON ENTITLED “*TO YOU*” BASED ON THE PROCLAMATION OF THE ANGELS TO THE SHEPHERDS – A SERMON BARTH PREACHED TO PRISON INMATES.

“TO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY A SAVIOR.”

IN LIKE FASHION, TODAY’S LESSON FROM I KINGS INCLUDES JUST A FEW WORDS THAT OFFER AN ENTIRE MESSAGE IN A SHORT PHRASE.

IT’S THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET ELIJAH – WITH AN EVER-SO-SLIGHT VARIATION – AND THESE WORDS CONTAIN THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE OF THIS PASSAGE.

“A PIECE OF CAKE.”

**ORDINARILY WHEN WE HEAR THOSE WORDS –
IF WE’RE NOT SPEAKING LITERALLY – WE MEAN
THAT SOMETHING IS PRETTY SIMPLE.**

***“I KNOW THIS MAY BE A LOT THAT I’M ASKING
YOU, BUT DO YOU THINK YOU’LL BE ABLE TO DO IT?”***

“DON’T WORRY. IT’S A PIECE OF CAKE.”

**LET’S LOOK, THOUGH, AT HOW THIS PHRASE IS
USED IN THIS PASSAGE.**

**CONSIDER THE SITUATION IN WHICH THIS
WOMAN – SOMEONE WHO HAS COME TO BE
KNOWN TO US AS “THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH” –
FINDS HERSELF.**

SHE & HER SON ARE DESTITUTE.

THEY’RE POOR & THEY’RE HUNGRY.

**THEY SCRAPE & STRUGGLE TO HAVE ENOUGH
FOOD TO MAKE IT THROUGH EACH DAY.**

**THEIR COUNTRY IS IN THE MIDST OF A
DROUGHT & THEY, ALONG WITH EVERYONE ELSE,
ARE WONDERING IF THEY'LL BE ABLE TO
SURVIVE.**

**IT IS IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS THAT ELIJAH
DARES TO ASK THIS POOR WOMAN FOR
ASSISTANCE.**

**WHAT GALL IT WOULD TAKE TO COME – AS A
MAN – TO A WOMAN TRYING HER BEST TO KEEP
HERSELF & HER SON ALIVE & ASK FOR FOOD!**

SUCH A REQUEST IS INEXCUSABLE!

IT'S UNTHINKABLE!

**AND YET ELIJAH IS SIMPLY DOING WHAT GOD
HAS INSTRUCTED HIM TO DO.**

**BUT HE'S ALSO UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT
THE WOMAN HERSELF HAS ALREADY BEEN**

INSTRUCTED BY GOD THAT HE'S COMING WITH THIS REQUEST.

APPARENTLY NOT!

BY ALL RIGHTS, THIS WIDOW SHOULD BE IN WORSE SHAPE THAN ELIJAH--SHE HAS TO BE ONE OF THOSE MOST AFFECTED BY THE DROUGHT.

IN A TIME OF NATIONAL CRISIS, HER NEEDS WOULD BE CONSIDERED LAST, ESPECIALLY UNDER THE REGIME OF THE ARROGANT KING AHAB.

AND INDEED, WHEN ELIJAH SHOWS UP AND REQUESTS A DRINK, SHE IS GATHERING STICKS TO WARM A LAST SUPPER FOR HERSELF AND HER SON.

THE WOMAN WANTS TO BE HOSPITABLE, BUT WHEN HE ASKS FOR BREAD TO GO WITH THE WATER, IT'S TOO MUCH.

**SHE TELLS HIM THAT SHE'S GATHERING
WOOD TO BAKE THE HANDFUL OF MEAL AND BIT
OF OIL THAT'S LEFT FOR HERSELF AND HER SON,
AND THAT THEY WILL EAT THIS MEAL AND AWAIT
DEATH.**

**APPARENTLY, SHE DIDN'T GET THE MEMO!
SHE DIDN'T *KNOW* THAT SHE WAS SUPPOSED
TO HELP ELIJAH.**

**BUT, WONDER OF WONDERS, SHE DOES!
AND THE IRONY OF IT IS THAT IF SHE HAD
DONE THE LOGICAL THING – THE SENSIBLE THING
– THE THING THAT ANYONE WOULD EXPECT A
NORMAL, LOVING MOTHER TO DO – IF SHE HAD
TOLD ELIJAH TO GET LOST BECAUSE SHE HAD
TROUBLES OF HER OWN – SHE & HER SON MOST
LIKELY WOULD HAVE DIED.**

BUT PRECISELY BECAUSE SHE *DIDN'T* DO THE LOGICAL, SENSIBLE THING – CLINGING TO LIFE TO THE BITTER END – HER LIFE WAS SAVED.

HERE WE HAVE AN OLD TESTAMENT ENACTMENT OF THE WORDS OF JESUS – “*FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO SAVE THEIR LIFE WILL LOSE IT, AND THOSE WHO LOSE THEIR LIFE FOR MY SAKE WILL SAVE IT.*”

CONSIDER ALL THE WIDOWS WHO SURELY LIVED IN ZAREPHATH.

BUT THIS IS THE ONE WHO GETS THAT TITLE – *THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.*

SHE'S THE ONLY ONE WE KNOW.

WE KNOW HER BECAUSE OF ONE SMALL, SIMPLE ACT OF KINDNESS OFFERED TO ANOTHER.

HENRY JAMES SAID “*THREE THINGS IN HUMAN LIFE ARE IMPORTANT: THE FIRST IS TO BE KIND. THE SECOND IS TO BE KIND. THE THIRD IS TO BE KIND.*”

IT WAS SUCH A SMALL, SEEMINGLY SIMPLE ACT OF KINDNESS THAT WAS OFFERED BY THIS WOMAN & HER STORY LIVES FOREVER.

SURE, MAYBE WE KNOW HER BETTER BECAUSE HER FOOD NEVER RAN OUT IN THAT JAR WHERE SHE KEPT IT.

WE KNOW THE STORY OF ELIJAH RAISING HER SON FROM HIS DEATHBED.

BOTH OF THOSE ARE STORIES OF WHAT WE MIGHT LABEL “MEGAMIRACLES” COMPARED TO THIS STORY OF “A PIECE OF CAKE” OFFERED TO THE PROPHET.

BUT WITHOUT THE STORY OF “A PIECE OF CAKE,” NEITHER MEGAMIRACLE EVER OCCURS.

IT WAS THAT SMALL ACT OF KINDNESS THAT SET EVERYTHING ELSE IN MOTION.

GIVEN HER CIRCUMSTANCES, WHAT THIS WOMAN DID WAS EXTRAORDINARY.

BUT AT ITS MOST BASIC LEVEL, IT WASN'T REALLY ALL THAT MUCH THAT SHE PROVIDED BECAUSE IT WASN'T ALL THAT MUCH THAT ELIJAH *REQUESTED*.

“*A PIECE OF CAKE*” WAS ALL HE ASKED OF HER.

HE DIDN'T WANT A FEAST.

HE WASN'T ASKING FOR A SEVEN COURSE MEAL.

HE ASKED FOR NOTHING MORE THAN “*A PIECE OF CAKE*” – A MORSEL OF BREAD.

WHAT A BIG LESSON IS FOUND IN THAT PIECE OF CAKE.

WE’D ALL LIKE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.

BUT HOW MANY PEOPLE – FRUSTRATED THAT THEY CAN’T DO *EVERYTHING* – SETTLE FOR DOING *NOTHING*?

I DOUBT THAT ANYONE WOULD OPENLY ADMIT THEY OPERATE ON THAT PHILOSOPHY, BUT GIVE THAT SERIOUS REFLECTION IN YOUR OWN LIFE.

AREN’T THERE LITTLE THINGS YOU DON’T BOTHER DOING BECAUSE YOU WANT TO FOCUS ON

**THE “BIG” THING – A BIG THING THAT NEVER
COMES ALONG?**

**YOU CAN’T MAKE A DIFFERENCE
EVERYWHERE, SO YOU DON’T TRY TO MAKE A
DIFFERENCE *ANYWHERE*.**

**WHAT IF YOU WOKE UP EVERY MORNING
DETERMINED THAT YOU WERE GOING TO MAKE A
DIFFERENCE – HOWEVER SMALL IT MIGHT BE – IN
THE LIFE OF JUST ONE PERSON?**

**WHAT IF – LIKE THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH –
NO MATTER WHAT YOU WERE FACING IN YOUR
OWN LIFE – YOU DECIDED TO OFFER “A PIECE OF
CAKE” TO JUST ONE PERSON EVERY DAY?**

GOD DOESN’T ASK MORE OF YOU THAN THAT.

**WHAT IF WE ALL – AS MEMBERS OF THIS
CHURCH FAMILY – WERE DETERMINED TO TOUCH**

**THE LIFE OF JUST ONE PERSON IN A PROFOUNDLY
POSITIVE WAY EVERY DAY?**

**PUT IT ALL TOGETHER & WE'RE TALKING
ABOUT HUNDREDS OF LIVES BEING TOUCHED.**

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT A 7-
COURSE MEAL WHEN "A PIECE OF CAKE" IS ALL
THAT'S ASKED OF YOU.**

**GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER WAS A
SPIRITUAL MAN WHO FELT HIS WORK WAS A GOD-
GIVEN MISSION.**

**THOUGH HE ENDURED RACIAL PREJUDICE
WHEREVER HE WENT, HE WORKED WITHOUT
BITTERNESS.**

**CARVER WAS PROLIFIC; HE HELD FEW
PATENTS BUT HAD HUNDREDS OF AGRICULTURAL
INVENTIONS AND PROCESSES TO IMPROVE CROP**

YIELDS, REVITALIZE DEPLETED SOIL, AND MAKE PRODUCTS FROM PEANUTS AND PEANUT WASTE.

CARVER UNDERSTOOD, AS WELL AS ANYONE, THAT ONE PERSON DOESN'T HAVE TO DO IT ALL.

IT'S SIMPLY A MATTER OF "A PIECE OF CAKE" – DOING WHATEVER IT IS THAT GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER ONCE SAID:
"WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I SAID TO GOD, 'GOD, TELL ME THE MYSTERY OF THE UNIVERSE.'

BUT GOD ANSWERED, 'THAT KNOWLEDGE IS FOR ME ALONE.'

SO I SAID, 'GOD, TELL ME THE MYSTERY OF THE PEANUT.'

THEN GOD SAID, 'WELL, GEORGE, THAT'S MORE NEARLY YOUR SIZE.'"

SO, TOO, FOR ALL OF US.

**WE DON'T HAVE TO DO *EVERYTHING* – BUT
THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE DON'T HAVE TO DO
ANYTHING.**

**“A PIECE OF CAKE” IS ALL GOD ASKS OF US – A
PIECE OF CAKE CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE &
TO ACCOMPLISH THAT SHOULD BE – AS THEY SAY -
“A PIECE OF CAKE.” AMEN.**

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*