



**June 6, 2010
Text – 1 Kings 17:8-16
Proper 5 (10), C**

God's Economy

A man who had just purchased a Rolls Royce pulled up to a traffic light and stopped as the light turned red. Another car pulled along side his, and quite coincidentally it was also a Rolls Royce.

The driver of the second Rolls Royce lowered his window and said to the new owner, "Beautiful! When did you get it?"

"This morning," the first driver answered.

"Is it fully equipped?"

"Of course."

"Then it has a wet bar?"

"Sure."

"Plasma TV?"

"Of course."

"With a stereo, laser disc and MP3 player?"

"Absolutely!"

"A digital phone, camcorder, and GPS?"

"Yep."

"Leather seats? A fax machine? Internet capability?"

"I said it was fully equipped."

"How do you like the water bed?"

"I don't have a water bed," the first man replied.





“Then it really isn’t fully equipped, is it?” the second man said as he rolled up his window and drove off.

Now the owner was just a little irritated and headed back to the dealer immediately. “You told me this car was fully equipped,” he said, “but it doesn’t have a water bed.”

“No problem, sir,” said the salesman. “We can install a water bed in about twenty minutes. We can do it right away.”

Somewhat mollified, the new owner agreed to wait twenty minutes, and sure enough in twenty minutes the Rolls Royce came out of the service department, now fully equipped.

Triumphantly, the new owner began to search for the man who had played one-upmanship with him and won. A few minutes later, he found the other Rolls Royce in the parking lot of a posh mall. The new owner drove up, parked beside it, and walked over to the other car and knocked on the window. But there was no answer, so he continued to knock. A good five minutes later, the window of the second Rolls Royce was lowered.

“I just want you to know,” the new owner said, “that my car is now fully equipped. It has a water bed.”

There was a startled look on the other man’s face, and then he said, “You mean you got me out of the shower to tell me that?”

That’s known as one-upmanship. We do it all the time. We drive ourselves ragged, wanting more, having more, becoming more – and yet all we seem to end up with are heart attacks and strokes, high blood pressure and sleepless nights, nervous breakdowns and lots of anxiety. We live in a consumer culture that threatens to consume us – think of the home foreclosures and overburdening debt that many people have experienced these past three years. Think of Greece living beyond its means. Think of Iceland almost bankrupt. Think of the United States with a deficit of 12 trillion dollars and growing, and with no clear resolve to pay it off.

In a survey several years ago, when people were asked what they wanted most in life, they replied “peace of mind.” One of the greatest challenges for experiencing “peace of mind” is to believe that God can meet all your needs. That may seem like an astounding claim, but it is precisely the message of the Bible, and we see it today in our lesson from First Kings.

It is a time of terrible economic and political turmoil in Israel and all the Middle East, not unlike our own today. A severe drought in the land is destroying crops, killing animals and drying up the water supply. People are being thrown out of their homes to die on the streets of thirst and starvation.





In such a catastrophic time, the prophet Elijah comes to the home of a poor widow living in the town of Zarephath. Like everyone else in her village, this widow who is the mother of a young son struggles to survive, barely staying alive day by day. When Elijah comes to her, he asks for water and she gives him a drink from what remains in her jug. Then he asks for bread, but she cries out that she has nothing left but a handful of grain in a jar, enough to feed her son and herself one last meal.

Elijah says to her, “Do not be afraid, but go and do as I have said. First make me a cake and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.” Elijah was asking this widow to trust God to provide for her needs, for he goes on to say, “For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.”

Now what would you do in the face of such an assertion? You’re hungry. The land has no crops. The water is drying up. What little you have, is enough for one last meal for you and your son. Would you trust God, believe what the prophet says, and give your last meal to him? Or, would you cling to your food, hold on to it tight, and try to secure yourself, protect yourself, and save yourself from starvation? Would you let go and let God, or would you hold back and hold on to what you have?

This woman was willing to trust God with the little that she had, and God did not disappoint – for the jar of meal was not emptied nor the jug of oil fail, thus providing continuous sustenance for her and her son.

Do you see the point here? First give to the Lord before serving yourself. This is the audacity of trust. Practice divine trust, and then trust in the divine. First open your door, setting an extra place at the table and in your heart, and then trust that the Lord will provide. Elijah proclaimed that she need not fear. Neither should we. Do not be afraid. Go and do. Trust in the providential care of God. Expend yourself generously, sacrificially, on behalf of God’s work, and God will care for you. Trust there will be enough.

Unlike the world’s economy, in the Christian economy the only way to receive the gift of life is to share it with others. If we keep it to ourselves, we die. If we share it with others, we live. We receive the gift of life as we pass it on to others.

Several years ago a lady by the name of Patricia West was asked by her physician if she would donate some of her blood to the blood bank. The physician knew something Patricia was only learning – that she had a very rare blood type. Her blood type and antibodies were found in only one of every five thousand people. Her doctor said, “Patricia, somebody’s life might depend on it.” Patricia didn’t hesitate. She said she would give her blood, and she did.





Later, Patricia moved from Florida to Michigan. Not long after, she underwent surgery. Something went wrong. She began to hemorrhage. She needed blood. Since her blood type was so rare, they couldn't find any. In desperation, they called the National Rare Donor Registry, and some blood of her type was located in the Edison Blood Bank in Florida. It was Patricia's blood! They packed it in dry ice and flew it to Michigan. Patricia West's life was saved because two years earlier she was willing to give her own blood even though she had no clear sense of why, except it was a good idea.

Rarely does what we give out come back to us quite as dramatically as it did in Patricia's case. Still, the greatest needs in your life and mine can be met through giving. If you need love, love someone. If you are lonely, befriend someone. If you want to stop feeling sorry for yourself, begin to care for others. If you need a purpose in life, get involved in a cause. If finances are a worry, give generously. God's blessing is continually put into circulation by our giving. The more we give, the more God blesses.

But, of course, all of this depends on faith. We have to trust the promises of God. We have to give before we can receive. It's like the story that comes to us out of the American southwest. An old prospector was thirsty for a drink, but couldn't find water, until he came to an abandoned well. There he found a pump and proceeded to pump with all the strength he had remaining. No water came forth. Then he saw a small jug with a cork at the top and a penciled note, directing that the water in the jug be poured into the pump to prime it. At first the thirsty man questioned this. What if the writer of the note had been mistaken? What if the pump no longer worked? Should he give up the water at hand for only a promise of more water to come? He decided to follow the directions. He used the little bit of water to prime the pump, and lo and behold, out came fresh, satisfying water. Before going his way, he filled the jug with water so the next thirsty person could secure water. He added to the note, "Believe me, it really works. You have to give before you receive."

One of my favorite prayers, one I recite most every day, is the prayer of generosity attributed to St. Ignatius Loyola.

Dear Lord,
Teach me true generosity.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve.
To give without counting the cost,
To fight heedless of wounds,
To labor without seeking rest,
To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward
Save the knowledge that I have done your will.

Dear people, as I reflect on my 27 years of ordained ministry, I don't see how anyone can reap the benefits of the Christian life – love, joy, peace, contentment – unless you trust God – and one of the most tangible ways of trusting God is by our willingness to be





generous with all that God has given us – to make ourselves available to God, to put our resources at God’s disposal, to be used by God for God’s purpose and to God’s glory. God has put you and me on this earth to give and to serve and to care and to share – to give to the poor and to support causes that make a difference in the world, to care for friends and family that need our love, and to share our time, talent and treasure with the church for God’s work here on earth.

So here’s the question: will you trust God with your life? Will you let go of whatever holds you back and give generously to whatever God wants you to do? Will you resist the consumer culture that beckons us to save ourselves, secure ourselves and protect ourselves at any cost, and instead will you resolve to give yourself wholeheartedly to the God who gave himself wholeheartedly to you in Jesus? Remember: Giving is God’s design for blessing. Trust God, step out in faith, and let God meet all your needs.

Dr. Gary Nicolosi

