

Sunday, June 18, 2017

Forest Hills United Methodist Church

Pentecost Sunday

Sermon: "Pouring from an Empty Pitcher"

Rev. Dr. David Werner

Scripture: 2 Kings 4:8-37

Text: 2 Kings 4:5b "They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring."

Blurb: Our church is considering a proposal from the Healthy Church Initiative (HCI) team to enter a year of Jubilee. Jubilee is about getting closer to God. Yet that happens only when we make room for God! This Sunday we'll encounter a story of a faithful woman who literally carved out space for God. That space later made possible new life, again literally! Our church is seeking new spiritual life, and this is something we all crave personally, too. Come this Sunday and learn how to create intentional space for God that can produce new spiritual life!

Gathering Song: Hymn Sing

Greeting - Blessing of Men: Pastor David

Worship Set: Sanctify

God of Grace, and God of Glory

Cornerstone

Simple Pursuit

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Kids invited to Kids' Church

Prayers: Spiritual Gifts: Pastor David

PP#1: *Holy Spirit Sermon Series graphic*

Holy Spirit Series - As Pentecost People, we have the God the Holy Spirit *in* us.

Guiding us, empowering us, equipping us.

We are all part of God's Church, doing God's work on earth.

The Holy Spirit has equipped you with distinct gifts.

PP#2: Romans 12:3b-8

"Think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."

PP#3: You are gifted!

Spiritual Gifts Inventory: www.foresthillsumc.net -> "Connect" tab

Pentecost People need to discern their gifts, and use them!

Church Website: Connects Tab: Spiritual Gifts. Introduction, explanation, and survey link.

Each of you, when you chose to follow Jesus, are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Each of you, when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, are given spiritual Gifts

Examples.

PP#4: Prayers for discerning and using your spiritual gifts.

Prayer for discerning our Spiritual gifts

PP#5: Gift boxes

Come get your gift box during the offering.

Use it as a reminder every day to open your spiritual gifts that day!

Gift boxes on the worship table: Reminder to open your gift each day

During the Offering: Come get your gift box!!

Love Offering

PP#6: Offering, including Love Offering

Offering: *Who You Are Sanctify*

Love Offering

Sermon Bumper

PP#7: Pouring from an Empty Pitcher

2 Kings 4:5b "They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring."

Our summer series on the Holy Spirit. "Pouring from an Empty Pitcher." 2 Kings 4:5b "They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring."

PP#8: *An image of Elisha, perhaps Elijah and Elisha*

Deep in the Old Testament are the stories of a prophet named *Elisha*. Now, this is not *Elijah*, as some of you may have heard about. *Elijah* is the prophet we hear about at Christmas, and during Jesus' ministry. *Elisha* was *Elijah*'s successor. At first he was his apprentice, but when *Elijah* was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind with the chariot of fire, *Elisha* took over being God's preacher, teacher, and prophet to the people of Israel.

You see, in the Old Testament, God's Holy Spirit wasn't given into every person like us today: it was only given into a select few. The prophets were people who were filled with God's Holy Spirit, and had the giftings of the Holy Spirit, usually in amazing and miraculous proportions. After all, they had a massive job to do, being the representative for God to God's people.

And interestingly, even though Elijah is more famous, his successor was actually the more powerful, and did greater things. I want to tell you about one of them today.

PP#9: 2 Kings 4:1-7 (CEB) The poor widow and the olive oil

1 Now there was a woman who had been married to a member of a group of prophets. She appealed to Elisha, saying, “My husband, your servant, is dead. You know how he feared the Lord. But now someone he owed money to has come to take my two children away as slaves.”

2 Elisha said to her, “What can I do for you? Tell me what you still have left in the house.”

She said, “Your servant has nothing at all in the house except a small jar of oil.”

3 He said, “Go out and borrow containers from all your neighbors. Get as many empty containers as possible.

We go to 2 Kings 4. Now the “wow” story starts in verse 8. But let’s not pass over the mini-story of the first seven verses. It’s a miracle similar to one that Elijah had done. Its about a wife of a godly man who recently died, and who was facing a hounding creditor who was coming to take her two sons to sell as slaves. All she had of value in her home was a small jar of olive oil. Elisha told her to collect piles of empty jars and pots and vessels—as many as she could—from all her neighbors.

PP#10: 2 Kings 4:1-7 (CEB) The poor widow and the olive oil

4 Then go in and close the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all those containers. Set each one aside when it’s full.”

5 She left Elisha and closed the door behind her and her sons. They brought her containers as she kept on pouring. 6 When she had filled the containers, she said to her son, “Bring me another container.”

He said to her, “There aren’t any more.” Then the oil stopped flowing, 7 and she reported this to the man of God.

He said, “Go! Sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what remains.”

Then, Elisha told the widow to pour oil out of her small jar, into all the empty vessels she had collected. And miraculously, the little jar kept pouring, more and more, until all the vessels were full. When the last was filled, the oil stopped flowing. Elisha told her to sell the oil, pay off her debts, and there was enough money for her and her sons to live on.

Pretty amazing miracle. God’s Holy Spirit dwelt in Elisha, and others were blessed. When the Holy Spirit *is sought*, more and more is poured from what—to us—is an empty pitcher! The only limit, if you notice, was how many *empty vessels* the woman collected. The *zeal* of her faith, evidenced in the number of empty vessels she *zealously* collected, created the capacity to receive what the Holy Spirit poured out.

Hang on to this story as we go to the next one. They are connected, these two stories. It’s about the capacity to receive more from God by increasing our openness, our emptiness, space in our lives, for God to fill.

Now, the first story was about a poor widow. But God just doesn’t care about the poor. He cares about all people, even rich people. Good thing, huh? Most of us are pretty well off, comfortable. This second story is about a wealthy woman, who also sought out God’s presence in

her life. The setting is in the village of Shunem, which is up in Galilee, the northern part of Israel. It's about 5 miles southeast of Nazareth, which 800 years later would become Jesus' home town.

PP#11: 2 Kings 4:8-37 (CEB) Elisha raises the son of a rich woman

8 One day Elisha went to Shunem. A rich woman lived there. She urged him to eat something, so whenever he passed by, he would stop in to eat some food. 9 She said to her husband, "Look, I know that he is a holy man of God and he passes by regularly. 10 Let's make a small room on the roof. We'll set up a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp for him there. Then when he comes to us, he can stay there."

Verse 8, "One day Elisha went to Shunem. A rich woman lived there. She urged him to eat something, so whenever he passed by, he would stop in to eat some food. She said to her husband, 'Look, I know that he is a holy man of God and he passes by regularly. Let's make a small room on the roof. We'll set up a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp for him there. Then when he comes to us, he can stay there.'"

These two women, the poor widow, and the rich wife, show us how we can seek more of God in our lives. They become examples for us to follow.

PP#12: Pouring from an Empty Pitcher

1. Seek more of God

It begins when we want more of God in our lives. For the poor widow, it was because of a crisis she was facing, something she couldn't handle on her own. This is a good time to come to God, isn't it? We do this! When we face something that we cannot handle, we turn to God. God wants us to! Now, God just doesn't want to be our emergency fix, but God wants to help us. And when we let Him, we learn to trust in Him more and more, and that's what He wants.

So, if you are facing something right now that is bigger than you, that you can't handle, seek God out. Give it to Him. He will walk you through it. Like the poor widow, you have to be involved and do what you can, but God will work what you cannot.

Or, notice the rich woman who wasn't in crisis, and who didn't need anything at all. Notice, she was seeking out more of God anyway. She had a radar tuned onto God.

Application for us: Do we have a desire for more of God? Do you want more? Or are you kind of content and comfortable just with the way things are? That can be dangerous, you know, because then we don't need much of God, and we like to stay in control. And then, God let's our lives get rattled and messed up, overwhelmed with something we can't handle, so we seek Him out.

But this rich lady was an amazing woman. She wasn't content. She was looking for more of God. And, when she saw Elisha, she recognized that he was a man of God: that he had God's Spirit in him. She also noticed that he went by every so often. So, *she created space in her home for him.*

PP#13: Image of home (or similar) at <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/497788565044313982/>

In ancient Israel, homes were rarely "finished" with roofs. Usually they were left flat in case the homeowner wanted to add another level. Sometimes it was temporarily finished in thatch, other times more permanently with clay or rock. If they were made with clay or rock, the people could go up there for extra space to sit, work, entertain, do whatever. Kind of like a deck. Sometimes people enclosed part of it, making a spare room, or storage space.

PP#14: Pouring from an Empty Pitcher

1. Seek more of God
2. Create emptiness (capacity)

And that's what this rich woman proposed. She had her husband create a spare room for the man she had identified as filled with God's Spirit. This woman created an empty space—capacity—for more of God in her life.

Listen folks, this lesson today is not rocket science. If you want to have more of God in your life, you need to create capacity for Him. You see, our biggest problem when we don't seem to experience much of God, is that we have very little room for Him to get in. All over the Bible is the pattern: if you want more of God, you have to begin by *emptying* from your life. This is what Sabbath is. This is what fasting is. This is why Jesus told the rich person to give away his wealth if he wanted to follow Jesus. This is why Jesus told His disciples to leave their former lives in order to follow Him. It's about capacity. It's about emptiness, so you can receive more.

A quick demonstration of this. Volunteer? [Get a volunteer from the congregation.] I want you to hold this big box. It's not heavy, just awkward. [Have them hold a big box.] Now, I want to give you one of these little gift boxes with candy inside. [Hold out little box.] Here it is. It's for you. How will you be able to receive it? [Put down the big box.] That's right, you need to put down what's in your hands in order to receive what I'm offering.

This is the principle with God. We can't just try to "add God" in our lives, hoping to keep juggling it all. We have to "put down" some parts of our lives.

Application for us: What do you need to put down in order to receive more from God? The Holy Spirit within you, it's been nudging you about something. It always does. It brings to our attention—sometimes in subtle ways—what we need to let go of in order to receive more of Him.

Well, one day Elisha is in his special room, and he asks the woman what he could do for her. But she said she wanted nothing in return. It was, from her, a true gift. But Elisha's servant notices that she and her husband had no children. So Elisha prophesies that she would bear a son. Sure enough, the next year, she had a son.

PP#15: 2 Kings 4:8-37 (CEB) Elisha raises the son of a rich woman

18 The child grew up. One day he ran to his father, who was with the harvest workers. 19 He said to his father, "Oh, my head! My head!"

The father said to a young man, "Carry him to his mother." 20 So he picked up the boy and brought him to his mother.

The boy sat on her lap until noon. Then he died.

But then, some years later, tragedy struck. We pick up the story in verse 18. "The child grew up. One day he ran to his father, who was with the harvest workers. He said to his father, 'Oh, my head! My head!' The father said to a young man, 'Carry him to his mother.' So he picked up the boy and brought him to his mother. The boy sat on her lap until noon. Then he died."

What a terrible heartache. Sounds to me like the boy had a brain aneurism. I don't know. All I know is how awful it would be if this happened to my kid.

Now the father didn't realize it, but sending the boy to his mother started a miracle. For she, as we have come to know, was a woman of deep faith.

PP#16: 2 Kings 4:8-37 (CEB) Elisha raises the son of a rich woman

21 She went up and laid him down on the bed for the man of God. Then she went out and closed the door. 22 She called her husband and said, “Send me one of the young men and one of the donkeys so that I can hurry to the man of God and come back.”

23 Her husband said, “Why are you going to him today? It’s not a new moon or sabbath.” She said, “Don’t worry about it.”

Verse 21, “She went up and laid him down on the bed for the man of God. Then she went out and closed the door. She called her husband and said, “Send me one of the young men and one of the donkeys so that I can hurry to the man of God and come back.” Her husband said, “Why are you going to him today? It’s not a new moon or sabbath.” She said, “Don’t worry about it.”

The room she had made for the man filled with God’s Spirit now becomes the room where she puts her greatest need, and greatest sorrow. She gives it—gives her dead son—to God, in the room she has created for God in her life.

Her husband can’t figure out what is going on. She wants to go see the religious guy, at a time like this? Why? It’s not a holy day? The husband, it seems, didn’t have much room for God in his life. He didn’t see any hope for his son.

She doesn’t have time to explain. “Drop it.” And off she rides, full speed.

She finds Elisha on Mount Carmel, off to the northeast, about 15 miles away. That would be about three hours in a hurry.

PP#17: 2 Kings 4:8-37 (CEB) Elisha raises the son of a rich woman

29 Elisha said to Gehazi, “Get ready, take my staff, and go! If you encounter anyone, don’t stop to greet them. If anyone greets you, don’t reply. Put my staff on the boy’s face.”

30 But the boy’s mother said, “I swear by your life and by the Lord’s life, I won’t leave you!” So Elisha got up and followed her.

31 Gehazi went on ahead of them. He set the staff on the young boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So he went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy didn’t wake up.”

Verse 29. “Elisha said to [his servant] Gehazi, ‘Get ready, take my staff, and go! If you encounter anyone, don’t stop to greet them. If anyone greets you, don’t reply. Put my staff on the boy’s face.’ But the boy’s mother said, ‘I swear by your life and by the Lord’s life, I won’t leave you!’ So Elisha got up and followed her. Gehazi went on ahead of them. He set the staff on the young boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So he went back to meet Elisha and told him, ‘The boy didn’t wake up.’”

PP#18: Pouring from an Empty Pitcher

1. Seek more of God
2. Create emptiness (capacity)
3. Cling to God’s Presence

Notice that the woman clung to the man with God’s presence. I don’t understand all of this, but I see again an example in the woman. In the midst of tragedy, she sought out God’s presence in her life, and she clung to it.

Application for us: How strong is your grip? Can you hang on? Even when things don't look good, can you cling to God? When things look hopeless to us, we can't give up on God. Our God is a God who doesn't see things like we do. He sees what we cannot. That's why we can't give up.

PP#19: 2 Kings 4:8-37 (CEB) Elisha raises the son of a rich woman

32 Elisha came into the house and saw the boy lying dead on his bed. 33 He went in and closed the door behind the two of them. Then he prayed to the Lord. 34 He got up on the bed and lay down on top of the child, putting his mouth on the boy's mouth, his eyes on the boy's eyes, his hands on the boy's hands. And as he bent over him, the child's skin grew warm.

Verse 32, "Elisha came into the house and saw the boy lying dead on his bed. He went in and closed the door behind the two of them. Then he prayed to the Lord. He got up on the bed and lay down on top of the child, putting his mouth on the boy's mouth, his eyes on the boy's eyes, his hands on the boy's hands. And as he bent over him, the child's skin grew warm."

The upper room became a prayer room! God's Spirit in Elisha prompted him to begin the miracle in prayer. That's where it starts!

And then, I'm not sure what Elisha did: it kind of seems like some form of CPR, but CPR wouldn't do much good in this case...the boy had been dead for at least eight hours. Not passed out. But even if you think that's what it might have been, then what about whatever caused the pain in the first place?

PP#20: 2 Kings 4:8-37 (CEB) Elisha raises the son of a rich woman

35 Then Elisha got down and paced back and forth in the house. Once again he got up on the bed and bent over the boy, at which point the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. 36 Elisha called for Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite woman." Gehazi called her, and she came to Elisha. He told her, "Pick up your son." 37 She came and fell at his feet, facedown on the ground. Then she picked up her son and left.

Verse 35, "Then Elisha got down and paced back and forth in the house. Once again he got up on the bed and bent over the boy, at which point the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. Elisha called for Gehazi and said, 'Call the Shunammite woman.' Gehazi called her, and she came to Elisha. He told her, 'Pick up your son.' She came and fell at his feet, facedown on the ground. Then she picked up her son and left."

Wow, now that's a powerful and amazing miracle by the man with God's Spirit. But did you notice the woman? Before she grabbed her son, she first gave thanks to God for the miracle. Would you do that? Wow, what a woman of amazing faith!

PP#21: Pouring from an Empty Pitcher

1. Seek more of God
2. Create emptiness (capacity)
3. Cling to God's Presence
4. God brings new life

I'm not so sure this story is told so we learn about Elisha. I think it's so we learn about this woman, and what it looks like to seek God. This can be us. When we want more of God in our lives,

when we empty our lives to let God have room, and when we cling to God's presence, God can bring new life to us in ways we cannot see.

The poor woman got a new future with her two sons. The rich woman literally received new life from God when her son was raised from the dead. This is for you and me, too. We can experience the pouring out of God's grace in our lives in ways we cannot see or expect: pouring out from an empty pitcher.

PP#22: *An image for the HCI Jubilee proposal. Perhaps use the graphic from the printout?*

I want to pause and make one more application from this story. It's for our church. We've been seeking more of God as a church, and we want to follow where God is leading. Our church has struggled to reach new people, which we know is God's prime directive for churches. So we've spent months studying, learning, discerning, praying, all part of the Healthy Church Initiative we signed up for last fall.

It culminated in a team of coaches coming on site, learning and listening, praying and seeking God. And they gave us a radical proposal to consider may be God's leading for our church. It's a proposal to stop much of the work and activity we do as a church, and to come aside with God. It's a year of Jubilee, where we spend the bulk of our time on Sunday morning worship, Wednesday evening relationship-building, and being nurtured in stream-lined small groups. This is proposed to be our primary focus for one year, starting this fall. The rest, we have to be ready to let go, or at least take a break from for a time.

This is indeed a radical proposal, isn't it? Wow! But you know what? We are willing to do radical things if Jesus is leading us. We are willing to do whatever Jesus wants.

Our question, what we need to discern, is: is this God's desire for us?

We've been called to prayer, especially over these past few weeks. And we're having a time of praise and prayer tonight, at 6. Please come. We're in a season of corporate discernment. Is this God's leading? And next Sunday, after worship, we're going to have our church take its vote.

Here's the key. As your pastor, I call us to ask the question, "Is this God's desire for our church?" That means we don't ask, "Do I like this?" "Does this make sense?" "Is this what I want." Those are the wrong questions. We ask, What does God want?"

I explained this some last week, and some folks thought I came across biased. Well, I'll admit it: I am. You see, I've been discerning this through for quite some time now. And part of my job as your pastor is to tell you the way I sense God is calling us. But not just me. Also the leadership of this church. And we have been discerning together that we sense God's wisdom—not necessarily human wisdom, but God's wisdom—in this proposal. It's radical. It's counterintuitive. But I need to tell you that it is biblical.

Last week I talked about how this resonates with the biblical calling to sabbath, and Jubilee. And today, I also see it resonating with this story of the Shunammite woman.

We are a church that is filled with the Holy Spirit. We desire God's Spirit to lead, empower, and equip us. We seek more of God in our church, and in our church's life. And the biblical principle for seeking more of God requires us to stop and make capacity. In order to receive more from God, we need to let go of some stuff. We need to create an emptiness that allows God room to work.

That's the value, biblically, that I see in the proposal to take a break from all that we've been doing. It's good stuff. But we want more of God. And that always means letting go of something else. It's true in our personal lives, and it is true, I believe, in our church's life. And it is in this way, that I see this proposal being biblically grounded.

So, the question for us all, is, is this God's calling for our church, now?

I can tell you that I, and the church leadership, think it just might be. And we're willing to go all in. I'm willing to do whatever God wants from me, from us. It seems rather radical. But I also know that our God often is.

I will say, as your pastor, that I've found this discerning process helpful for us as a church. I think it has caused us to take an honest look at ourselves, and to stop and ask, "Why does our church do what it does?" "How much of this is because I like it, or because it fits me?" "Am I willing to let go of something I find meaningful, if it would help us reach new people?" "Am I willing to stop doing what is comfortable and try something different?" "Am I willing to let my church change in ways that don't necessarily make sense." "Why or why not?"

We've had some good conversations, and, church, I've been so impressed with your honest wrestling with all this. This church does have a heart for God! Now, what we are trying to discern is how God may be calling us to be different in order for us to better reach new people. It's hard. Cleaning out is hard. Letting go is hard. Creating emptiness is counterintuitive. But it is God-work. And the deepest question is, "What does God want?"

PP#23: Pouring from an Empty Pitcher

2 Kings 4:5b "They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring."

The Holy Spirit poured out oil into countless jars. The Holy Spirit poured out new life into the dead boy's body. The Holy Spirit is pouring out blessing in your life. The Holy Spirit is pouring out a new future on this church. "They brought the jars to her, and she kept pouring." Pouring from an empty pitcher. It's comes from God, not us.

Amen.

Closing Song: *Trust and Obey* Sanctify

Benediction: Pastor David

Today: Lifeline