

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
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First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV

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1 Kings 17:8-16

She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days.
(1 Kings 17:15 N.R.S.V.)

When You Are Down to Your Last Can of Spam

I am a child of God. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and my Savior. And I believe he has the power to change my life.

Today I want to talk to you a little about Spam. And no I don't mean the junk e-mails that are always jamming up your computer. I mean the mystery meat that comes in the little blue cans.

Spam was first introduced in the 1930's when our country was going through the great depression. Jay Hormel noticed that the perfectly good- but not necessarily desirable - pork-shoulder meat was going to waste in his meat-packing plant. He came up with the idea of processing the meat with a little ham, squeezing it into a can and selling it as an affordable meat for the financially strapped populace.

Spam quickly became a big seller. It was not universally liked, but it helped people get by. During WWII Spam was the main diet for soldiers in the fields, a part of their canned K-rations. Spam was also used as a standard part of the food aid offered to displaced refugees and Allied nations during the war.

Spam is still around today and some people really love it. But most people think of it more as a food of last resort- something for people living on the edge of life and death. It is not fancy, and it doesn't really look all that good, but in a pinch it will sustain you.

In our Old Testament lesson the prophet, Elijah meets a poor, single mother, who is down to her last can of Spam. The Bible doesn't really say that, of course. It says that she was down to a little bit of oil, and a small amount of flour, just enough for one more meal for her and her son. But this story comes alive for me when I imagine a poor, single mother with no family to help her, no friends to count on, and no government support either. Her son is crying that he is hungry and she goes to the cupboard to look. Maybe she has already been there and found it empty. But now she sees something way down on the very last shelf, way in the back, a small, lonely can of spam.

It is a God send, no doubt about it. Oh, she knows that once this last can of Spam is gone, that will be it. Her and her son will starve to death. But right now she is determined to celebrate with one last meal. She is going to fire up the stove and they are going to feast on fried Spam tonight.

This single mom, or widow if you prefer, goes outside to get a little fuel for the fire. Already her mouth is starting to water for fried Spam.

Then suddenly along comes Elijah the prophet. He interrupts her thoughts and her work, “could you spare me a drink of water.” Now in the Middle East hospitality is a sacred duty, and she doesn’t mind getting him a drink of water. Then he goes further, “oh and could you bring me a bit of Spam while you are at it?” What would you have done?

The Bible only gives us the Cliff Notes of what happened next. But I imagine this single mom reacting like a mother bear when someone was about to take one of her cubs away. “Away with you, you hairy old man. Who do you think you are anyway? Coming in here demanding to be fed. I’ll have you know that I am literally down to my last can of Spam and you are not going to get it. My son and I are going to starve to death, but before we do, we are going to have one last meal. And you are not going to ruin that for us.” By this time the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Elijah manages to comfort this desperate mom. He tells her that God will provide for her. She will have an endless supply of Spam. But first he tells her, go on and get me a little bit of the Spam and bring it to me. Then go fix some for yourself and your son.

The astounding thing is she does what is asked of her. And her generosity is rewarded. Every meal she goes to the cupboard and there is always one last can of Spam. She serves that to Elijah, her son, and herself. The next meal she goes back to the cupboard and there is again one last can of Spam. God provides for her during this tough time.

The point of the story is that this woman did what God asked her to do through Elijah the prophet. And her sharing results not in her having less, but rather in her having much more. It results in her always having enough.

So what do you think? Is this story something that only happens in the Bible but not in real life? Or is it possible that God still calls us to go out to the edge of faith for him and there he provides for us? Our society says that if you want more, give less. But God says, if you want to have more, give more. Which will you believe?

Let me pull this out just a little bit more. First I want you to note that the miracle in the story today happens when the woman acts in faith. First she has to go and give some of her last hoard of food away to the Elijah, and only then does she get to see the miracle.

A similar thing happens in the New Testament account where Jesus feeds the five thousand. Out of scarcity, God brings abundance. But first comes the act of generous sharing. A young boy is willing to share his lunch with the whole crowd. He only has five loaves and two fish, but he gives what he has. And Jesus multiplies that act of sharing so that everyone has more than enough to eat. So much more that 12 full baskets of food are gathered up afterwards.

Now I want you to understand that we do not “buy” or “earn” miracles from God with our acts of sharing generously. Rather we place ourselves in a position that we can see God working.

If we have a good income and we keep most of that for ourselves, then it is very hard for us to see God's hand in sustaining us. It is easy to fall into the trap of believing that we are providing for ourselves. There are no miracles involved, we have what we have because of our hard work. God is still there, but we don't see God, we don't encounter God, we don't experience God- in all his might and in all his love.

But from time to time, God brings us all close to the edge. Something happens and mentally, physically, emotionally we hit a wall. We are down to our last can of Spam. Maybe you find yourself there this morning.

Maybe you are down to your last can of Spam this morning and it feels like God is asking you to keep right on stepping out in faith- to give up that very last can. That can be a scary thing. But it can also be an exciting time. Now you are going to see what God can do.

For where God calls, he also provides. That is not only the example of scripture it is the story told over and over again in the lives of millions of Christians down to this very day. I know that it has happened to me.

When you are on the edge like that, and God provides, you see God in action. Because you know that there is no other way these things are going to happen. There is no feeling quite like that. Encounters like that change us, mold us, refine us. They make us grow spiritually. Praise God for that!

So if you are down to your last can of Spam this morning, don't let fear overwhelm you. Step out in faith, put your trust in God. This is your opportunity to encounter God anew. For God never calls us where he cannot provide for us.

Amen.