II Kings 4:1-7, Philippians 4:10-14, Mark 7:24-30

“Thriving on Crumbs”

 What a great pleasure and privilege it is to be in the midst of God’s kingdom here in Moscow. I always thought that when we die heaven is going to look something like this. Currently I’m serving in Strasburg, PA which is really in the heart of Amish country where we have more horse drawn buggies than we do cars. Well, not really, but we are in the heart of Amish country. And I’m not saying this because we have 5 members of my church here, but we absolutely love it there. Don’t get me wrong, we miss Moscow tremendously and of course miss all of you, but for the first time in our lives we have found a place where we feel as if it is home, a permanent home.

 I have always told people that while I was serving here you were the hardest group to preach to. Not that you were critical by any stretch of the imagination. But your diversity creates a real crisis for the preacher. It’s not just your ethnic diversity, but your nationalities, your financial state in life, so many things are different between you, but what unites all of you is the love that you have for Jesus Christ. I think it was here that I learned that I was better served, and people were better served if I chose my Scripture and then let the Scripture speak, instead of approaching it with a preconceived idea of what I was going to say already and then say it with Scripture to support it. It has served me well.

 So, today, I didn’t do that at all, I was thinking of what was one of the major lessons that I learned in my years here at MPC and that was how to thrive on crumbs. I think many of you know exactly what I mean and I can just say that term and you get it without having to go into it. We could stop right here and you would say, yeah, I know what he means. But let’s break it down by reading the Gospel lesson that we find in Mark 8:24-30

**READ**

It is going to be another one of those sermons where you will have to follow along in the readings for today in the Bible. So, let’s get started in II Kings 4. You may already know these verses as well. Let’s set the stage. Elisha is the prophet of the day, the prophet serving the Lord God. A friend of his passes away and his widow is struggling to survive. MPC you know something about widow’s struggling to survive. She calls out to Elisha and this man of God comes to her and instead of consoling her, instead of giving her some money to survive for a week, instead of not answering his phone he asks her two questions, what can I do for you, and, what do you have in the house. He asks them one after another so she can’t respond to the first because he already had an answer for it.

 I have never been in a situation where I am so desperate to make ends meet because of tragedy that has struck my family. I have ministered to plenty of people who have been in that situation, but I have never been in it. I’m guessing that I would just want someone to minister to me so that I wouldn’t have to figure out for myself what to do. But not Elisha. What do you have in the house? How can you help yourself? What kind of crumbs do you have in the house that you can do something with? What kind of crumbs do you have in your life that you can do something with?

 I have a little oil, but I mean, who doesn’t? I mean, it would be like if someone said: I have some pilmini, but I mean who doesn’t have pilmini in Russia? Plus it is only one jar and it is a jar that I need. Elisha tells her to go and do something creative, something that no one ever imagined like convert the most notorious night club into a soup kitchen, or take the hostels around Moscow and make them into shelters for refugees fearing for their lives.

 She doesn’t sit around and let others do the work for her. In fact, she includes those around her. She gets her neighbors involved by donating their vessel, you’ll get them back, but only when you buy the oil that I’m going to sell to you. No, she was very industrious. That is what it takes. Take what you have around you, and there is plenty of it around you, and use it. Use it, don’t let others do the work that God has set out for you today just because you are in a different country. If you let any more time go by you will miss your opportunity.

 And she does. And from that one little act of faith, simply because she obeyed what the man of God told her to do, she was able to take that crumb, take that oil, that single resource, and multiply it so that she had enough to last a lifetime. There are so many aspects to that story that I don’t know where to start, so I’m going to just move to the next Scripture reading.

 The next Scripture deals with Paul’s approach to living. I am no Paul, but I so try to live as he preaches and especially in these verses. He tells us that he learned to be content with what he had no matter where he was and no matter what the living conditions and no matter what reality he found himself in. I know, that is so easy for me to say that I try to live my life as Paul says we do, to be content with what we have, because quite frankly, I have a lot. I have a beautiful wife, three stunning daughters, a dog, a cat, a home, a nice yard, a college fund, I’m employed, life is good and I’m happy, very happy. Paul tells us to be happy with what you have, and I am, because life is good. Easy for me to say, but you know, I didn’t say it first.

 Paul said it. He knew what it was to have little. He knew what it meant to be forsaken. He knew as he says in I Corinthians 6:4, that he had great endurance in affliction, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger. He knew all that any of us have known and then some. Is your time in Moscow something like what Paul is talking about? If it is, then don’t listen to me, I can’t relate to you, I don’t know you. Isn’t that right Daniel, I don’t know you, I haven’t lived the life you’ve lived. I haven’t face the difficulties you have faced, so don’t listen to me. But please listen to what our Almighty God tells us through the pen of our brother Paul. I have learned the secret of having plenty and of being in need. I have learned the lesson of living on crumbs.

 Because sometimes having plenty can be a burden to bear as well. How do we use the resources that God has given us specifically for the glory of God? In some ways you could be dealing with the crumbs of wisdom because you weren’t taught this in business school or at any school for that matter how to tithe and be generous. But thriving on crumbs as the widow did and as Paul does as he tell us here all actually revolves around Paul’s words in Philippians 4:13. What are Paul’s words in 4:13?

 You know, it’s funny, because in the US we are masters at dividing and splitting in churches because we don’t like something, or something doesn’t sit with us and normally it happens with those who have a certain agenda. But that is why I loved serving overseas. You don’t see that happen.

 We don’t have time for that here. This is not an American church, it never has been, it is the church of Jesus Christ and for 50 years people have checked their pride, their desires, their wants at the door because the kingdom of God is not about our desires, but God’s desires.

 The widow of Elisha’s friend was able to thrive on crumbs because she listened to God’s desires to show her grace. Paul reflected on how God was able to be glorified in his life because he had experienced want and need and lived to rejoice about it.

 A few weeks ago we had a woman named Terry Roberts come and speak at our church in Strasburg. You may not know her name. She is the mother of the shooter of the Amish girls at the school house that took place a number of years ago. She is also a cancer survivor. The pain that she has been through in her life from losing a son in the shooting, to her son being the one who took so many young lives and having to live with that shame, to being on the brink of death with her cancer, you know, I just might listen to her more than Paul if she tells me how her life is going. But she is able to look at a Christian who is going through a rough patch in their life and say: get over it. I mean, I can’t say that because that would be insensitive. But she can say it because she knows what it means to walk through the valley of the shadow of death and feel God’s presence by you as your entire world is falling apart.

 She can say live your life fully by picking up the crumbs that fall from the table for that is sufficient to live an extraordinary life. And that takes us to the Gospel lesson in Mark 7:24-30. We, again, know this story. Jesus goes to a house and doesn’t want anyone to know it, but everyone finds out about it anyway, including a foreigner who had a sick daughter. Well, apparently she is one of the most persistent in that crowd of people because she actually is able to get to the table and ask Jesus for a blessing.

 She had no hope, just a glimmer because she went after Jesus. She begs, begs Jesus to cast out a demon from her daughter. The answer is no, and it is the type of no that when you read it you get the same reaction when Jesus tells his mother at the wedding in Cana, woman, what do you want from me? It was not a kind answer to call the Syrophoenician woman a dog. I can’t theologically tidy it up. But it serves a purpose. And the purpose is to show that the woman’s state when she meets Jesus is desperate and continues to be desperate even after Jesus answers her question and her plea for a blessing.

 There is no hope left for her. But like that widow who keeps knocking on the door of the judge until her gives in and gives her justice, this woman goes out and grabs the pots of oil. She took the time to make sure that they were all filled to the top. She knew, as Paul did, how to live with nothing, nothing. Not just materially but also with no hope. But with her eyes fixed on Jesus she refused to give up. She knew that she could do all things because Jesus was right in front of her and she believed that he could do all things.

 Do you see what is going to happen next. The holy Spirit gives her words that seem to surprise Jesus because of her faith: Even the dogs, that’s me Jesus, that’s okay, I’ll describe myself as a dog if that will get my daughter healed, even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table. Just throw me a crumb and you’ll see, I’ll thrive, I’ll more than survive. Jesus doesn’t give her much hope, but she takes what he does give her. Jesus allowed her to thrive on crumbs and her daughter was healed. Thriving on crumbs, that is what she did.

 Faith goes a long way in seeing the oil around you, in rejoicing in the good that can be found in the messy and unkempt, and in healing in living. I want to encourage you dear MPC, to continue the legacy that has been this church for these 50 years of thriving on living on crumbs, because that way God is able to do some amazing things. Amen.