

Sermon Text for June 11, 2023

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

II Kings 4:1-7, Matthew 6:25-34

“The provision of God”

I am so grateful to Doug Friant who was able to fill in for me last week. It is such a relief and so relaxing to know that someone is here sharing the Word of God and leading you in the Sacrament of Communion that loves Jesus and that you all enjoy as well. I was able to take pretty much all of last week off, the week of Memorial Day. After the parade and our hot dog extravaganza I played golf and shot a hole in one. So the week started off great for me.

We drove down as a family just outside of Atlanta, Georgia where I married off my nephew to his now wife. It was like Thanksgiving with pretty much all of our families there. It was great to be with my brothers and the 9 of the 10 cousins together just enjoying themselves. Great to be able to share a single hotel room with all three of our girls.

On the way down we stopped in Montgomery, Alabama and visited a bucket list item for us, it is called the Legacy Museum. Our oldest, Rachel, became interested in law school back in 2017 or so because she was able to take a seminar where Brian Stevenson visited. He wrote the book *Just Mercy* and founded the Innocence project and Equal Justice Initiative. He helped to make this Legacy Museum which takes you on a journey from the first days of slavery where African people were taken from their homes and taken all over the world, including here in the United States. And he traced this legacy that went from slavery to now what is mass incarceration and the timeline and the connection between the two.

It was incredibly moving and incredibly sobering. While we were in there for five hours it felt a lot to me like when I was in the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. Just so much suffering and pain and injustice caused by people who professed to be believers in Jesus Christ. And this is the part that stays with you. Throughout the museum you saw people of faith within the African American community that took stands for justice and yet were beaten and spat upon and it could seem from the outside looking in that God may have favored the oppressor. The same thing you can see in the Holocaust museum. The Jewish people who from Abraham were considered the people of God and yet in history they have gone through so much and suffered so much. How can we say with certainty and with conviction that God has provided for his people over time?

Both of our Scriptures today address the promise that we find in Scripture that God will provide, even as His people walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The promise that we see repeated over and over again is that not only will I provide, but I will provide you with a sense of peace that passes all understanding and that will wash away any of the anxiety that you may be experiencing. One commentator labeled this section as the disciple and anxiety. Six times in our Matthew Scripture we see this term anxiety or anxious, or worry mentioned. Both of our Scriptures provide a promise of provision that ought to drive God's people, each one of us, to a life of righteousness. Let's read.

READ

Let's make our way back to II Kings and what we find is a perfect case for anxiety. If there ever were a person who was justified in being anxious, it was this widow of a pastor. They were living their life as a normal couple with a couple of kids, a pastor and his wife, when he dies and she has no source of income and nothing upon which to live. She quickly becomes destitute and they have bills to pay and the only way to pay them is to sell her children into slavery. Not a great choice. She calls out to Elisha, man of God, here we are faithful to God and yet we find ourselves in this condition. What happened to God's promise of provision? We haven't done anything wrong and yet here we are.

Let's be clear that her concern is real. She isn't lazy, she isn't unfaithful, she has done nothing wrong, and yet her life is on the brink of falling apart because of one tragic event in her life which turned everything upside down. We have a family in our preschool were just last week dad was driving home, suffered a heart attack and now is in a medically induced coma and they don't know if he is going to make it. One day to the next, what do I do to say nothing of the love of my life being in a coma, but how am I going to take care of my kids and myself?

How does Elisha handle this concern. How does Elisha assure her of God's provision? He doesn't tell her to do nothing. Provision is not a result of our inaction, it is a result of God's action. We can't sit around when we are in need and expect God to put cash in our bank account. No, he gives her a task that is very specific and very directed. He tells her you are going to have to work hard, and she is willing to do it. You are going to have to involve your children, it is just going to be you and your family getting this done, shut the door behind you, don't let any distractions get in the way, obey my words.

And she does, and God provides miraculously, but the widow and her family worked hard. God does provide, but there is something redeeming about hard work. Hard work does not

eliminate the provision of God, and it certainly doesn't replace it. Look at II Thessalonians 3:6-13, it is kind of long but listen to especially vs.10, anyone unwilling to work should not eat. The pilgrims when they founded this country used this verse as both an incentive and a stick for the settlers. This is what has created what is still present in our country and which I hope never disappears, which is a very strong Protestant Work Ethic. We did that, yet at the same time we know that it is not a substitute for God's provision.

Let's not get it mixed up. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that God helps those who help themselves. This is heresy and not Scripture. Provision is not based on a quid pro quo agreement where if you do this I'll do that. If you work hard then God will provide. That is not the way it works. No, merely the fact that you are a child of God is sufficient for you to know that you will be provided for.

Hard work is what we do, but not who we are. We are children of God and our first pursuit has to be righteousness and if we pursue righteousness first and foremost what we will find is that our anxiety and our worry and our fear will pass away. This leads us neatly into our Matthew Scripture. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added onto you. If you seek my face you will see my provision.

Six times in these verses in Matthew the term anxiety or anxious or worry or fear are mentioned. It is an important theme that Jesus obviously wants to address. Jesus knows us well, he knows we worry, he knows we are anxious. For some of us it prevents us from doing God's will, which is righteousness. In fact, Jesus in vs.30 clearly states that anxiety is a sign of little faith. When you are anxious you do not trust God as you ought to trust God. This may sound a bit harsh and I don't want to add guilt upon anxiety, but maybe it is a motivation to understand why we are anxious.

Our lives are filled with legitimate concerns. When we look at our future there are benchmarks that we are trying to reach that sometimes seem a bit daunting. How do we keep our kids safe when they are being killed in the classroom? There is definitely something we can do about it, but there is also a degree of trust that you need to have to know that some elements are out of our hands. Sin will manifest itself at times and when people sin, many times children are injured and bear the brunt of that sin.

These legitimate concerns can manifest themselves in ways that we can misunderstand. As we find ourselves in the midst of an impending drought and with the smoke that filled our skies we can see at times first hand that it simply is not true that all birds are adequately fed and

that all lilies reach their pinnacle of beauty. The counsel don't worry about tomorrow should not lead people to a lack of planning. This is the danger of these verses. What if we didn't plan at all for our West Virginia mission trip, and just trust blindly that God would provide and we will just follow his lead? I'm guessing we would find ourselves with a very unproductive and potentially unsafe week.

But remember in this passage Jesus is speaking to his disciples who did indeed leave all behind to follow him and they knew that they did not have a bed to sleep on potentially night in and night out. The disciples knew what it meant to rely on God's provision because at that time they were totally reliant upon God's provision for all things day in and day out in a very visible way.

Paul gives us encouragement for that as well in both Philippians 4:6 where he states: Do not worry, or do not be anxious about anything. Then again in I Peter 5:7 we read: Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares for you. I know, it is one thing to say it and it is another thing to live. Just because you hear from me do not worry, cast all your cares on Jesus it doesn't mean that you are actually going to do it. Living as Jesus reminds his disciples in vs. 33 where we are striving after the kingdom of God is what eliminates, totally eliminates the anxiety in our life. Not just knowing that God will provide, but actually living knowing that God is providing is key.

This assurance that we get from Scripture ought to take us away from our frantic pursuit of "things" and allow the peace of Christ to take over us. The key to avoiding anxiety is to make the kingdom one's priority. That is what we are trying to do here at the church. This day of baptism and renewal is a good start for any and each of us who might be thinking that we want to live a life with less anxiety. Use today as an opportunity to renew our vows before God which can manifest itself with less worry and more trust.

For Christians of every age, whether they were first century disciples following Jesus, or 21st century disciples living lives of obedience to Christ, anxiety is incompatible with a lifestyle focused on the kingdom. May God bless us and keep us as we look to trust in God's provision at all times. Amen.