

1 Kings 17:8-16 The miracle of the flour
Ps. 146 Hymn to the God of help
Mark 12:38-44 The widow's mite
Hebrews 9:24-28

(May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.)

When I was a child, I used to read a fairy tale called *The Magic Porridge Pot*. It was a story about an **ordinary cooking pot that was transformed into an extraordinary one** and given to a hungry little girl who could make it start and stop producing porridge by using certain magic words.

Unfortunately, the little girl forgot the magic words to make it stop, so the pot kept pumping out so much porridge that it eventually filled the house, the town, and then the whole country side, In fact, we might now be sitting knee deep in porridge if someone hadn't come along who knew the workings of that pot and said, "Little pot, STOP!"

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In today's old testament reading, there is also an **ordinary container transformed into an extraordinary one**.

However, there is no magic formula, no magic words. The little pot is always full until such a time when the drought in the land has ended. God you see, doesn't make mistakes, like giving out magic words that little children can forget.

A fairy tale or reality?

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I have a favorite book, and have had since early childhood, called *The Sleepy Village*. Its pages are filled with wondrous color, flowers hanging from houses, a crescent moon slipping across the sky as day is transformed into night and as, one by one, the villagers look at an old clock steeple, close their shops, yawn, and go home for the night.

I've always known it was a pretend place...a fairy tale, but I've kept the book all through the years...even though the backing and cover have come off and only the inside pages are left...held together by my very own will and a rubber band...because...it's always been a comfort to me.

As some of you may know, in September of the year 2000, my husband Tom and I went to Austria for our vacation. We stayed in a small town call Kufstein, a picture book village remarkably like the one I'd kept for all these years. I was struck by the "reality" of this place and felt as if I had somehow wandered into the pages of my favorite book.

Of course, I was told, every Bavarian town looks like this; and, now, I know that the writer of my favorite tale had probably just drawn the pictures of a town already in existence.

But, for me, or at least the child inside of me, that town had never really existed, except in that book.

It had been a **fairy tale**...something made up, not **real**.

Or, at least, so I had thought. And there I was, actually walking down the streets of its pages.

The contents of my book hadn't changed, but I had.

And my seemingly solid ideas of "what was real" needed a second look...because I now had to ask myself about all the other books I've read. Which of them was also based on reality...and which on imagination?

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There will be days when you step into the pages of this book that we call the Bible and think that what you are reading is "just a story"...without any basis in fact...an impossible fairy tale.

But, like my "Sleepy Village," although the Bible hasn't changed in a long time, either...hopefully, we have.

For example, for years, this particular set of readings--the miracle of the meal and oil; the widow's mite; and the importance of Jesus' sacrifice--had been used as a means of parting Christians with their hard-earned money. I'm fairly certain that most of the adults in the congregation have heard

these readings used in stewardship sermons which promote the sacrifice of material wealth...usually to the church...in order to gain the favor of God (not from our present Rector, thank goodness).

But, do we really believe that...the God who created heaven and earth needs the words and pictures printed on wood pulp (i.e., money) to accomplish His work? Particularly since He's sent His own Word and Example into the world to do just that?

I think that if there's any stewardship to be found in these readings, it's the stewardship of "taking care of" one's faith...and doing that BEFORE some trial comes along that may or may not put that faith to the test.

In other words,

"Seek ye FIRST the Kingdom of God and all else will be provided"

because the Widow during Elijah's time had to believe what Elijah said BEFORE she chose to share her (and her child's) last meal.

And the Widow during Jesus time had to love and trust God more than herself BEFORE she chose to give up what little she had to live on.

And Jesus had to trust God and agree to do God's will BEFORE he chose to suffer and die on the cross.

Each of these readings involves a choice made under life threatening conditions...a particularly bad time, I might add, to be wondering whether God really exists.

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One day, when I was still un-retired, a co-worker who had followed me in his car to work, made fun of the way in which I'd followed the speed limit, particularly when everyone else was going faster than the law allowed.

I asked him whether the law was made to coincide with what we wanted to do (and could, therefore, be changed at a moment's whim) or whether it was there so that we could learn to follow a law that was meant to protect us?

He countered with a scenario and question of his own for me:

What if I was traveling through a desert and came to a cross road with a stop sign. I could see for miles in any direction and there were no cars coming. Would I stop?

"Yes," I answered. "Or at least, I certainly HOPE I would."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because, if I'm not faithful in little things, how can I be faithful in big ones."

"What about using your common sense," he countered.

So I asked HIM a question:

"Tell, me, when a football team is on the practice field, do the blockers step aside when the rush is on because they know that, today, the game isn't for real...or do they practice getting it right, so that in the real game, when the going gets tough, their responses will be automatic?"

The question went unanswered. In fact, the entire conversation came to a halt.

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But, today's readings tell us not only WHAT we should be practicing but how we, the children of God, have been learning these lessons from early childhood...

where, figuratively speaking, the child of the Old Testament is asked to give up her only cookie, for the promise of an unlimited supply...

and the New Testament child has grown up enough to give up two cookies, without any promise of anything...

and, finally, where a very special Child is willing to give up everything, even knowing that he will be hurt because he is doing what he knows to be right.

"Letting go" isn't easy. That's why God has spent our entire lives teaching us not to be afraid of it...so that when the big day comes, our responses will be automatic.

Didn't we have to let go of our mothers' wombs before we could be born?

And didn't we have to let go of the furniture before we could learn to walk?

What about letting go of home when we went to school?

And the even harder task of letting go of a friend or family member when it is his or her time to move on?

Look around you...and see how God has put his teaching...his Word...into the world.

How many times have we been like the very young child of the Old Testament, just beginning to learn, giving up one thing for the promise of something better?

Or, like the New Testament child, simply giving for the sake of giving?

And what about all those times that, like the Special Child we call Jesus, we've told the truth, even when we've feared that we'd be punished for doing so.

Each lesson is a page in the Book of Life...a true book and no fairy tale.

And each lesson, well-learned, transforms and feeds us, allowing us to grow up as children of God.

None of today's readings are just...things that happened a long time ago...the "good old days," as it were. They are "of God"...and, as such, were, are, and will be, forever.

Each day that you choose to "let go" of something that you thought you couldn't live without, all for the sake of love...or for the knowledge that doing it was the right thing to do, YOU are the vessel that is being transformed.

And one day, the world will ponder the reality of your story.

God grant that it reads something like this:

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there were people living in a land that had stopped yielding food

because all around them, the world did not have the Water of Life.

But God looked into the heart of each individual, and knew that even though it looked bleak, there were those who could be counted on to do what was right...no matter what the cost.

So he transformed these seemingly ordinary vessels into extraordinary ones, feeding them with the Word of God...until such a time when

the Living Water once again flowed freely through the land.

Amen.