

**JUST ENOUGH: A Sermon by Dan Stern, BCUCC, June 10, 2007**  
Pentecost C2: 1 Kings 17:8-22; Luke 7:11-16

Enough: The word speaks to me in multiple layers of meaning. It is a calm, almost primal assurance of inner peace and providence. It is a shout of protest against another senseless war, as in, "Enough of these lies! Enough killing!" The word is painted upon the sky at each day's end when our weariness properly speaks not of frustration, but of having given our best. The purple sunset says, "Day is done. It is over. It is well. You've done enough."

At choir practice last week, we sang through the 'day is done' evening hymns section in the New Century Hymnal. These are the songs we hardly ever get to sing together at BCUCC because we're nearly always at church in the morning. But we had so much fun doing it, we decided we wanted to help plan an evening musical event here, and that starting this Fall at rehearsal, we'd sing through the entire hymnal one section at a time.

There are *enough* great hymns and gospel songs available for one to learn through the singing of them all the basics about the Bible and the Christian faith. That's how I took in my emerging faith as a youngster – by learning to sing it. If you try, you can find a song or two about any major Biblical character. Our own New Century Hymnal has a handy reference index in the back which indicates which parts of the Bible a particular hymn's lyrics are based upon.

You could do something similar to what the choir intends to do with our hymnal by doing a direct reading of all the books of the Bible, taking them in categories, perhaps starting with your main area of interest. For instance, if you are interested in law, history, or ancient myths, you may as well start right in with Genesis and Exodus. If you're into architecture like Sam, read about later history – about King Solomon and the building of the first big Jewish temple. Try the Songs of Songs if you are a fan of sexy poetry; peruse the Psalms if you've been feeling sad. Or take all the books and main characters of the Bible alphabetically from A to Z. If you do that, you'll be starting right out with two of my all-time favorite books of the Bible – the Acts of the Apostles and the prophet Amos. Amos happens to be one of the most-suppressed parts of the Bible. People in power don't like prophets like Amos, because it's pretty clear that if Amos were alive in America today, he'd be addressing Dick Cheney, George Bush, and Karl Rove by name, and telling them up front, in the name of God, to stop community-destroying, oil profiteering, warmongering. He would, by the way, have been pretty hard on Bill Clinton too. We will be taking a closer look at some of these too-often neglected Biblical prophets later this summer.

Anyhoo, if you keep reading through the Bible from A to Z, by the time you get to the E's you'll be looking at everyone from Ezra to the Ephesians, including both Ezekiel, who the choir just sang about, and Elijah, who we look at in today's Old Testament text. And just so you don't confuse those two: Ezekiel, the one we sang about, had that wild dream about a "wheel in a wheel", and is also famous for his vision of the "field of dry bones" that came alive when prophesied to. (Soloist Dave Herald has sung about 'dem bones' here before). Ezekiel was a priest, a religious insider who later, during the Exile, became a prophet, a religious outsider. Elijah, on the other hand, was probably trained from the start in one of Samuel's prophet schools, and increasingly became known as a great and miraculous healer. We'll be hearing more about Elijah and his successor, Elisha, in the weeks to come too.

When many of us think of prophets, we think of severe, unfun guys running around nearly naked in the desert, wailing, as did poet singer Bob Dylan a good time later, that "a hard rain's gonna fall"; that God's judgment on us all will be harsh. I certainly don't know for a fact that, quote-unquote, "God's judgment won't fall like a hard rain" on a selfish,

unrepentant human race. There's a fair degree of Biblical support for this theory! But I've come to believe with much confidence that the language of God's wrath in the Bible really says less about God, and more about us. God is at the very core, I'm utterly convinced, all forgiveness and love.

Which makes Elijah's evolution from prophet to healer all the more appropriate. A godly prophet in the best Judeo-Christian sense of the word is always ultimately a healer – even if it may not seem that way at first, given the strict ethical standards s/he often insists upon – do be sure to note that prophets are hardest on the rich and the powerful: "To whom much is given, much is expected". But a prophet is, at the end of the day, a healer of all people and nations. A prophet is someone who upsets, even reverses the otherwise-depressive pattern of life always and only leading to death. A prophet is one who makes God's death-leading-to-life-power visible and apparent – especially for the poor and bereft. Both of today's readings are prophet-healer stories that defy death, that declare it not to be the final word: the first story, about Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, and the second, about Jesus and the widow of Nain. Onlookers were quick to compare Jesus' miraculous action with that of Elijah, saying that in Jesus "a great prophet has (again) come among us." In both instances, the only sons of needy, vulnerable widows are brought back to life.

Please remember: widows were, in Biblical times, in a very precarious position, without means of support or standing in society. When Elijah marches right up to this poor woman from a foreign city infamous for the worship of pagan gods, and when Jesus did something similar with the widow at Nain, in both instances, intimately touching the dead and blatantly breaking the rules about clean and unclean, these 'great prophets' put compassion for the weak and powerless over religious establishment do's and don't's.

But notice too: it is the poor vulnerable widow herself, not Elijah, who first takes the big risk to be generous in the midst of scarcity. Even in the throws of this terrible famine, and with only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug, the widow bluntly states that she is prepared to take her own last morsel of bread home to her son before they both lie down to die of starvation! But Ezekiel convinces her to not be afraid, to trust in what I like to call 'the enoughness of God'.

And rather than getting caught up on the mechanics of the miracle that follows, let's stay with that theme: the 'enoughness' of God.

The enoughness of God is readily apparent throughout scripture. Often the real heroine, the one who gets the 'enoughness' of God, is a poor widow! Like the one Jesus said gave more with a few pennies than all those who gave out of their abundance, because she gave everything she had to God.

From Exodus 16: The Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day alone". Here we find that there's just enough for the precious time being, not for forever.

For Matthew 5: "Give us this day (not every day, forever) our daily bread" and "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And consider the lilies of the field – how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Just enough for the time being, not for forever, stored in barns and in banks!

I believe that there's not only enough good provisions for me, but enough good provisions for us all. No, not for everyone's greed, but for everyone's need, yes. There's enough. Enough of everything. And that sense of enough-ness is something I believe we absolutely must experience if we are to keep on doing what we have to in this life. Ironically, it's not the naïve privileged ones who tend to believe in God's enough-ness the most, it's the needy and the poor. Perhaps the poor, in order to survive, have to especially believe it: that have to know that somehow, one day, in spite of all unfairness and inequality leading up to it, the Lord will abundantly provide.

Does all this imply that senseless accidents will never occur? No. Will loved ones suffer and die untimely deaths? Yes, sometimes they will. Is life fair? Of course, it is not! Will we ever learn that war won't resolve our troubles and going shopping won't satisfy our nagging hunger? Maybe, maybe not. Is the world everywhere and already a place of abundance? Not yet! But neither is it a place of utter and bereft scarcity. And if we make it our main focus, the enoughness of God will carry us. There won't always be an abundance of flour and cooking oil with which to bake, but flour and cooking oil enough. There won't always be a cure, but there will always be healing enough. Life will seldom if ever be completely fair, with God's help, fair enough. Help it to be so.