

WD December 16, 2024

“Making Things a Little Bit Better”

Last week a team of a dozen folks from Grace traveled to North Carolina to help with the recovery from Hurricane Helene. Two others who were locals also worked with us, one was a former member who retired out there. (He and his wife were a great host—most appreciated Gary and Jill). We worked at seven different properties around the Hendersonville area each with trees down and clean up work to get done. Our freshly trained chainsaw guys eagerly put their new training to work and many trees were cut and cleaned up. Two of our team brought along a skid steer that made short work of stumps, large logs, and even some grade work. You will probably hear much more about all it in upcoming services.

For now I want to point out one consistent pattern that was at each location. I call it the disaster before the disaster. Jan at our first stop was an elderly, independent woman who fell and broke an ankle not so long back. She has a huge property that is fast becoming more than she can handle.

At later stop Susan was a single woman from Korea. She was getting a lot of harassment from her neighbors to clean up the downed trees because they didn't want to see the mess in the woods behind her house. This was a woman that struck me as one who was facing the world alone and needed someone just to care about her. She was eager for company and told one of our ladies all about her life.

The one that struck us all most, that we met on the same day, was Diane. She was diagnosed with terminal colon cancer and was given three months. We met her at 10 months. Her husband Mike, who had a stroke eight years before, has little used of his left side. Diane was sweet, kind, loved Jesus and clearly worried about her husband when she is gone. We cleaned up two good sized trees for them. The next morning the secretary at the church that was sending us out to work, share an email from Diane that she sent after our visit. She told us that she received bad news after we left that I can only conclude meant that nothing more could be done now. Yet she was extremely grateful and considered our work a huge help at the perfect time. It brought her piece of mind and felt like a huge burden lifted off of their shoulders.

Disaster or tribulation don't just come with hurricanes. For Jan it was age and physical limitations from a fall. For Susan it was having neighbors who don't get to know her. For Diane and Mike it was cancer and stroke. The hurricane just made the trouble much more complicated.

This to me is the picture in 1 Kings 17 when Elijah goes to live with the widow at Zarephath in Sidon. Elijah must travel to get there outside of Israel. Look at verse 10ff. ¹⁰ So Elijah went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” ¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

¹² “As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

As a widow there was no one to supply her with what is needed. She is getting ready to make one last meal for her son, whom she can no longer feed. She is out of resources and notice that she expects no help. She is poor and on top of everything else a famine is hitting the land which is why Elijah was sent to her. This poor widow was suffering her own personal disaster long before the drought. Her condition when Elijah found her was her storm. Instead of fallen trees it was a need to feed her son.

Like those we met in North Carolina, this widow was feeling overwhelmed. It weighed heavy on her mind ultimately deciding there was nothing left to do. Likewise Big trees for an elderly, single woman or for one already fighting cancer is a huge thing that only adds to a difficult time and can steal a person's peace.

Elijah's job was simple. Go. Show up. Just like Jesus commands His disciples in the Great Commission of Matthew 28. “Go and disciple the nations.” Here in 1 Kings 17 its “Go to the woman and stay with her.” Through Elijah God supplied them with a jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry until the Lord sent rain once again. For us it was go to North Carolina. All together there were 14 people that the Lord sent willing to do what the Lord equipped them to do—cut trees and move the debris for those who couldn't. A couple of homeowners offered their homes and great meals. A neighbor decided to join us

and give his time as well. I could also go into the string of events and coordination from the church, the district and many people behind the scenes. This trip was possible because the Lord put the pieces together.

The goal was to leave the people a little better off than we found them. Going to help with disaster recovery isn't about fixing all a person's problems. Cleaning up some trees doesn't prevent cancer or age-related problems or loneliness. It just makes things a little bit better and maybe takes a little bit of the load off. All the Lord is asking us to do is to offer what we have and let the Lord do the rest. And that my friends is all part of discipling. We can do that right?

Thank you to Gary and Jill, Will and Lisa, Dave and Julie, to Rick, Mark, Donna, Erica, Larry and Joy, Wayne, Brad, Ray, Tom, Sean, to Pastor John, David and our friends at Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church for helping to make things a little bit better for Jesus' sake. Blessings.

Pastor Matt Woods

John 3:30