

MORE THAN WORDS: ADVENT DEVOTIONS

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CARE: WEEK OF NOVEMBER 10, 2024

Sunday Scripture: 1 Kings 17:8-16

Then the word of the Lord came to [Elijah], saying, “Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there, for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.” As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” But she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said, but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.” She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

Reflection: On care

Emily Trubey-Weller

I have a cat who believes he is a human baby.

Okay, that is a slight exaggeration, but he is by far the neediest animal with whom I've ever had the pleasure of cohabitating (and I've had many). He greets you at the door when you arrive and bids you farewell there when you leave. He is underfoot when you are cooking, cleaning, or caring for children. He rushes into any door when he hears it open, whether it is a bedroom, closet, or the

outdoors, and moments later, he can be heard meowing loudly to be brought back to the other side. He also meows loudly to be picked up and held. Often he meows loudly for no discernable reason. In a previous home, he would hop the fence to the neighbor's yard but require that you lift him back over. He expects more or less constant interaction. He has had the most medical issues and highest vet bills of any pet by far. He drools profusely on you if he is happy, which he often is. He is the first cat I ever had, and he went against a lot of what I was told to expect of a cat. Please keep in mind, I am a dog person, and I find this cat to be *a lot*.

This high-maintenance yet delightful creature requires lots of care. That care demands quite a bit of his human companions: time and energy, attention and affection, financial commitments, emotional labor, provision of food and medication, and willingness to change outfits multiple times daily due to drool spots. Caring for him goes far beyond just liking him, or even loving him.

Friends, we are God's needy cat. We need constant care and affection. But while I grumble about vet bills and answer the door begrudgingly to let in the cat after illicit outdoor adventures, God never minds. In fact, our loving Creator never tires of providing us with time and energy, attention and affection, all that we need to survive and thrive. Jesus goes to great lengths to care for us, to accompany us on our human journey, and to gift us with salvation.

When I am able to remember my own neediness and the ways in which I have been cared for by God on my human journey, often through the hands of others, I can respond a bit more generously to the needs of my cat. And on a really good day, I can respond a bit more generously to the very big needs of the people around me, too. The care that has been poured into me becomes an offering poured out for others.

It's possible, of course, to pour out too much. Unlike God's, our stores of caring are not endless and can be abused. The widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17 reminds us of this when she points out to Elijah that she cannot provide a meal for him; she doesn't even have enough for herself and her son. In a world where the self-care industry turns quite a profit yet often fails to provide the true rest and care that we need, I am often surprised by how genuine care for others provides care for my heart, too, even in small ways. In providing for Elijah, the widow receives God's care for herself and her son.

Weekly prompt

When has someone provided you with genuine loving care? Who or what in your life is in need of such care today, especially in a tiny way (a person, creature, creation, or project)? How do you know when your stores for care have run dry? In caring for others, have you ever cared for yourself, too?

Words of wisdom

“All praise to You, my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light.
Keep me, O keep me, King of kings,
Beneath the shelter of Your wings.”

Thomas Ken, “All Praise to You, My God, This Night”

“Lean on me when you’re not strong.
I’ll be your friend, I’ll help you carry on...”

Bill Withers, “Lean on Me”

Prayer

God, I need your care.
Part of me wishes I didn’t,
preferring that I was fine on my own.

No bother to you, or to anyone.

God, take away my fear of troubling others,
my dread of inconveniencing you.

Show me the beauty of my dependence;
show me the breadth of your care.
Open my heart to perceive this world
as your constant, ready, joyful answer to my need:
 the people in my life,
 the food on my table,
 the sun overhead,
 the rain soaking the earth,
 (and the things I name now...).

Teach me to say with the psalmist:
You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

God, lift my hands from my own bootstraps
so that I can feel the overflow of your blessings.
Amen.

Daily scripture for the week of November 10

Monday, care for others: “Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:4)

Tuesday, care through financial giving: “[Jesus] looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.’” (Luke 21:1-4)

Wednesday, God’s care for all of creation: “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?” (Matthew 6:26)

Thursday, our care for creation: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” (Genesis 1:26, 31)

Friday, care out of being cared for: “Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with a skin disease; cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.” (Matthew 10:8)

Saturday, the labor of care: “Whatever task you must do, work as if your soul depends on it, as for the Lord and not for humans...” (Colossians 3:23)