

6pm Evening Prayer Sunday 16 August 2026

2 Kings 4:1-37 and Acts 16:1-15 – ***God who is more generous than we can ever imagine***

In both of our readings this evening we see God inspiring people to take the initiative to put their trust in him, and then blessing them abundantly.

The widow who came to Elisha was in desperate straits, she had ***nothing in the house, except a jar of oil***, and there's a creditor who's come to exercise his right, under law, to take her two children as slaves until they've worked off the debt that is due. All she has left to her is a sense that, because her husband had ***feared the Lord***, God will not abandon her family.

And God takes her trust in him and turns her life around. With the money from the oil that flows from that one jar, and from the vessels that her children can gather from the neighbours, the widow is not only able to ***pay [all] her debts***, but now has enough for her and her children to live on.

And again, with the wealthy woman living in Shunem, after God prompts her to offer first a meal to Elisha whenever he's passing that way, and then to create a guest room ***so that he can stay there whenever he comes to [her home]***, she is blessed with the one thing that her wealth could not give her; she is blessed with a son.

And when her beloved little boy falls ill and dies, and God stirs her to ***quickly go to Elisha, the man of God*** and bring him back with her; through Elisha, God brings her son back to life. She has to conceal her son's death from the husband, who thinks religion is only for sabbaths and festivals, because he would have assumed there was nothing to do but mourn for the boy. But even in her distress, she has enough faith to believe ***it will be all right*** and to set off with all possible speed in search of Elisha. And when Elisha ***prayed to the Lord***, he is able to bring the boy back to life.

And then there are Paul and his companions, who trust in a clear sense from the Holy Spirit that they are not to preach the word in Bithynia in Asia Minor, but should instead sail for Macedonia, in northern Greece. And in Philippi, they

find that ***outside the city gate [by] the river*** there is not just ***a place of prayer***, but a group of ***women who had gathered there*** who include Lydia, ***a worshipper of God***, and ***the Lord opened her heart to respond to God's message***. And Lydia does not just become a believer in Christ but invites Paul and his companions to ***come and stay at [her] house***.

Paul was doubtless very glad that ***she persuaded us*** to go to her house, because it is not long before Lydia is hosting gatherings of the early church in Philippi; later in that same chapter, when Paul and Silas are discharged from prison after the authorities get cold feet about imprisoning them (especially after discovering that Paul and Silas are Roman citizens), Paul and Silas will go straight from prison to Lydia's home, to encourage the brothers and sisters who are meeting there.

In each of our readings we hear about people who responded to the prompting of God, and who then discovered the abundant blessings of our generous God. We are never told the names of either the destitute widow, or the wealthy woman of Shunem, or of Paul's companions (although we know from the switch in v11 from "they" and "them" to "we" and "us" that Paul and the others were joined at Troas by Luke). These people might be nameless, but we should be inspired by their willingness to trust in God and encouraged when we see where their faith leads them.

James wrote to the early church ***Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you***. When we turn our hearts to God; when we respond to the people he puts in our path with hospitality; when we follow God's lead and we get into conversation about him with the people we meet ... this is when we discover that God is more generous, and his goodness more abundant, and far broader in scope, than we might ever have imagined.