# Let’s Make a Habit of Hope

## Week 3 - Sunday 3March

#### ‘Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm’ (Hebrews 10:23a NLT)

The world is listening out for voices of hope in the midst of war, crisis, poverty and injustice, and we have a message of hope to tell. In our faithful response to God, we choose to be those who look for hope and who hold tight to it, that others might get hold of it too. At the close of our Self-Denial Appeal, we have the chance to bring hope in a tangible way through our gifts.

## Sermon Outline

#### 2 Kings 4:1-7 – ‘They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring.’ (v5)

Introduction:
Is there enough to go round? You might start by thinking about (or even demonstrating) the frustration of having a cake which you have to cut into ever-smaller pieces if you want to make it go round a lot of people. You might also begin by finding one of the many stories about people who’ve been sharing out food with those in need and have found that the food has kept multiplying so there was more than enough for everyone. Maybe that’s even happened to you.

Many times during his ministry, Jesus did multiplication miracles – feeding thousands of people with a tiny amount of food, turning water into wine. And then there were the transformation miracles – calming storms, walking on water, causing Peter to find a fish with a coin in its mouth. What’s the point of these miracles? Is it something to do with helping us to understand that we don’t live in a ‘zero sum’ world – a world where there’s only so much to go round, a world where things can’t change for the better? That world is shaped by fear – what if there’s not enough for me, what if things never get better, what if the downward spiral just keeps going down? – whereas the world Jesus demonstrates (otherwise known as the Kingdom of God) is a place where there is always more than enough and there is always hope.

This message is particularly pertinent on Altar Service Sunday, when we’re thinking about officers around the world who serve in contexts where there isn’t always enough to go round, and where many in those communities don’t have the resources or get the wages they need to survive. We make our gifts of money in faith that God will multiply them so that there is more than enough.

The prophet Elisha is often seen as a ‘type’ or ‘foreshadow’ of Jesus, and his ministry was full of multiplication and transformation miracles, like this story of the widow’s oil. If we want to make a habit of holding on to hope, what might we learn from her?

### Hope begins with honesty

This story begins in a dark place: probable starvation for the widowed woman, and slavery for her sons (v1). She doesn’t sugar-coat her situation when she speaks with Elisha, and that must have taken great courage.

Do we avoid being honest because others might think we’re making a fuss, being selfish or lacking faith?

Often the journey to hope can begin only when we own our despair and ask for help.

What small step of honesty might you take today, to begin the journey from despair to hope?

### Hope remembers the small things

When Elisha asks what the woman has in her house, she says she has nothing, and then she remembers a small jar of oil (v2).

Despair can make us forget the good things we do have in our lives.

Just two weeks ago we thought about making a habit of remembering. It’s helpful to actively remember the blessings we do hold, even when everything else seems hopeless.

‘What do you have in your house?’ What’s the small thing you have which God wants you to remember and give thanks for today?

### Hope goes hand in hand with generosity

Elisha tells the woman to gather as many jars as she can from her neighbours (v3).

One family needs a miracle, but it takes a whole community for that miracle to happen. Since the oil stopped pouring when the jar ran out, we assume that, if only a few neighbours had lent their jars, she would have got only a small amount of oil.

Not only did she need to be bold in asking, but the community also needed to be generous in lending and giving. We can only participate in the ‘more than enough’ economy of the Kingdom of God if we work together and share what we have with one another.

Giving can be a tricky subject, especially if we ourselves feel we don’t have enough and can’t afford to give anything away. It’s worth noting here that the community didn’t have to give her their jars. They could have lent them to her and reclaimed them afterwards. There are lots of ways to help others, even when we can’t afford to give money.

What might God be asking you to give or lend, to help someone in your community today?

### Hope prays

Elisha tells the woman to go inside and close the door (v4).

Centuries later, Jesus began teaching his disciples about the ‘more than enough’ economy of God’s Kingdom, and he used that same phrase, or something close to it. As they listened to Jesus talking about going into an inner room and closing the door to pray, Jesus’ hearers would have had the story of the widow’s oil echoing in their minds, and they would have made the connection between prayer and miracles.

Last week we reflected on making a habit of prayer, and that is inextricably linked with our habit of holding on to hope. Jesus talked about moving mountains through our prayers, which sounds a lot like the ‘more than enough’ economy of God’s Kingdom. Prayer is how we step into that Kingdom.

Where would you love to see hope flourish, either for yourself or for someone else? You can’t make the oil flow but you can lend a jar and then pray, pray, pray.

### Conclusion:

An abundant flow of oil poured out of that little jar which, at first, had seemed so inadequate. The jars were filled, the oil was sold and the woman’s family was saved. A miracle happened that day which has no other explanation than the intervention of God’s Spirit. But the miracle was born in an atmosphere of honest, thankful, generous, prayerful hope. Hope opens the door to God’s ‘more than enough’ Kingdom.

## Prayer and Worship Ideas

### Self-Denial Altar Service

If you are including an Altar Service as part of the meeting, invite people to pray a very simple prayer as they give their money:

‘Lord, I give you this gift. Multiply it, I pray, and use it to bring hope. Amen.’

### Jars Prayer Station

Set up a table with lots of empty pots and jars on it and a jug of oil. Invite people to think of a situation which feels hopeless and to ask God for a miracle. As they pray, invite them to pour some oil into one of the pots or jars, as a way of expressing trust in God and a determination to hold on to hope.

### Sow into a miracle

A woman was meeting with some friends and shared that a member of her family was in urgent financial need. Each friend who was present decided to give a small amount of money as a ‘seed’, and then to join the woman in praying for a miracle. The amount raised from the group was tiny, but it was an act of generosity and faith. Some time later the miracle happened, and the person in need received almost 100 times the amount the friends had sown.

Is there a situation in your local community where a miracle is needed? Could you agree together as a corps to sow into that situation by giving or lending something you have (remember, it doesn’t have to be money), and could you then commit to praying for a miracle to happen? You’ll even get the joy of telling the story when the situation gets miraculously resolved and everyone wonders how it happened.

### Take a risk

The woman in the 2 Kings story must have been terrified to pour that last bit of oil into someone else’s jar. Once you’ve poured oil, it’s very hard to get it all back because it coats the sides of the pot, so you end up with less of it. She took a risk in the name of hope.

Is God asking you to take a risk: to give something to someone, even though you don’t feel like you can afford to lose it; to start something, even though you don’t know if it will work; to let go of something, so that God can put something new in your hands? However scary that risk may feel, and however often you have second thoughts, remind yourself that there is always more than enough in God’s Kingdom. Choose to hold on to hope.

### Hope for those in slavery

The story of the widow and the oil is also about some children who have a near-encounter with slavery. If the woman had not been able to find some money, they would have been taken from her and sold.

The Salvation Army is seeking to be a voice for hope for those who have been sold into modern-day slavery. One way to respond to the challenges posed in this ancient story in 2 Kings 4 is to find out how you can help bring an end to slavery in our time.