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This year our network meeting for Episcopal Relief & Development was not one large meeting, but several smaller regional meetings. I attended the meeting in Menlo Park, California.

We learned about the new brand, tagline and core areas. I have included a press release (see September press release) that explains those changes much better than I can explain them.

So, instead of providing the more technical details of the conference which are better covered in the other article, I will share instead my reflections on the Bible Study from our Saturday morning session. It was from 2 Kings 4:1-7. The story of Elisha and the widow's oil.

In the story, the widow comes to Elisha with her fear of the creditors taking her children as slaves. He asks her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" She tells him that she has nothing but a jar of oil. He instructs her to borrow empty vessels from her neighbors and then to shut the door and start filling the vessels. The children kept bringing in vessels and she kept filling them. When they were out of vessels the oil stopped flowing. Elisha told her then to sell the oil and pay her debts and live on the rest.

This story is a great illustration of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). Using what we have to help our neighbors and ourselves. People asking for help and then using their gifts to help themselves and their neighbors. Oh, and a little bit of faith thrown in there too. For more information on ABCD, visit, <https://calledtotransformation.org/>

As part of the Bible study, three different people read the story, so we heard it three times. We were asked to pay attention to a word or phrase that spoke to us at each reading. The first time I heard it, the ABCD approach came to mind. When we pay attention to what we have, then we can use what we have to make a difference in the world. Elisha asked her “What do you have in the house?”

What do we have? That is an important question and it often gets buried under the thoughts and fears of lack and scarcity. We forget sometimes about what we have.

The second time hearing it, the word vessels stuck in my mind. I wondered if the widow was going to have to return all of those vessels to her neighbors or to pay them for the vessels. The story doesn't explain that detail, it just says she borrowed them. I guess some would say it is beside the point (and I don't know anything about oil sales so it probably doesn't matter). The point of the story is to use the gifts God gave us, get help from our neighbors (and to give help to them) and to trust God that it will all be OK. Someone at the conference said, “God takes enough and makes abundance.”

The vessel theme stayed with me though, and I thought about it again after hearing the story a third time. But this time I thought about us as the vessels. How we are being filled and emptied. We can be useful. Sometimes we are empty and awaiting our next assignment. Sometimes we get tired and feel empty.

I read Lauren Winner's book *Still* on the airplane. She says, “I am a little too invested in how I'm feeling about church and God, and perhaps not invested enough in how I am serving church, God, neighbor.”

It is easy to feel empty. To feel like we have been endlessly poured out. Giving, serving, doing. To be tired of church and to feel separated from God. I think many of us go through times of feeling that way. I know I do. I also get way too caught up sometimes in my feelings. What I need to do is step back and really ask how I am serving church, God, neighbor. I need to remember that God will equip me with what I need to do all that God is asking me to do. Even when I don't feel like it.

During the conference we talked about the differences of doing something for someone vs. doing something with someone. Our new tagline. *Working Together for Lasting Change* helps us to live into this way of being. When we work *with* others it empowers them to use the gifts that God gave them. Sometimes we forget that doing God's work isn't about how good it feels to help someone. It isn't about us or our feelings at all. It is

about loving God, building relationships, empowering and equipping others to use their God given talents. If we can do that together, we will make lasting change.