

Lectionary B November 8, 2015, 24th Sunday after Pentecost
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Roberta Meyer
1 Kings 17:8-16
Psalm 146
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44

Two Widows and Jesus

What I want to know is what happened to the widow after she put her last pennies in the treasury at the temple. Was she prepared, like the widow in the Old Testament story to die? Was her faith so strong that she trusted God to take care of her? Or did she trust God to be with her in her death?

Did she have children at home? Had she come to her brink watching her family starve? Did she come to the temple that day to make sure she was right with God before she died?

Did she know Jesus was there? Did she even know who Jesus was? Was she trying to be an example to all of us two thousand years later? Or was she merely just spending her last day being faithful to the only one she could trust?

I wonder if the Old Testament story we read today inspired her. She must have been familiar with the story of another widow who willingly gave her last morsel away knowing full well death was around the corner for her son and herself. This story of a widow's willingness to obey God and how it saved the lives of her small boy and herself could have very well given her hope for her own situation.

But how? Surely she didn't think Elijah would appear with some flour and oil, enough to last until her luck changed. No. I think this widow was merely doing the only thing within her power to do. Be obedient. Give what she had to her Lord. And trust that no matter what happened God was there with her.

And God was there! Jesus was watching her. Jesus was feeling her pain. You see, I think when Jesus pointed this woman out to the disciples, it wasn't to glorify a perfect model of stewardship. Although she was ridiculously generous when she had nothing to give, I think Jesus wasn't swelling with pride in her. No, I think Jesus was lamenting. Listen to his words from the Message Bible. *"The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford—she gave her all."*

Jesus had been watching all the people who gave that day. We read that he observed *"Many of the rich were making large contributions."* Well, that is if you count the cold cash that was dropped into the till. It was a lot of money. But if one counted the impact their gift had on their livelihood, it was just pocket change that they would never miss. Their lives would never be affected by that handful of change that jangled as it rolled into the offering box.

But that poor widow. Jesus saw her. Jesus felt her anguish as she gave her last penny away. And do you know what else? I think Jesus was really upset with all those rich characters who were flaunting their “generosity” around as if they deserved a pat on the back for giving their pocket money to the temple.

Why does money make even us church people so—well, I’m just going to say it. Why does money make us so stupid?

Let me tell you a true story. Several years ago, when I was a member of a different church, I observed something just like what Jesus saw.

One Sunday two different new families came to worship. One family was the new CEO of the local hospital, his wife, and daughter. The other family was a single mother and her teenage son.

Well, everyone flocked around the CEO family bending over backwards making them feel welcome. That was all good and well. Making them feel welcome is what we Christians are supposed to do, right? But I’m not sure the motives were pure.

Because that single mother and her son sat alone, fumbling around the bulletin and hymnal, trying to find their own way through the service. A few sort of welcomed them but it was obvious to me that most of the attention was directed to where everyone thought most of the wealth and popularity was.

Maybe I’m totally wrong. I hope I read that situation wrong, but I’m afraid I didn’t. Because that is the way our society is wired. Wealth and power are very important. Too important.

That is what Jesus saw that day. Jesus had just been teaching his disciples about this kind of thing. *“Watch out for the religion scholars. They love to walk around in academic gowns, preening in the radiance of public flattery, basking in prominent positions, sitting at the head table at every church function. And all the time they are exploiting the weak and helpless. The longer their prayers, the worse they get. But they’ll pay for it in the end.”* In another translation it says *“They devour widows’ houses”*. That is what Jesus saw that day. His poor daughter giving her last and if it wasn’t for Jesus, she more than likely would have never been noticed. That is the good news of today’s Gospel.

Jesus noticed the poor widow. To Jesus she was not invisible. She was important and—her contribution to the treasury?—Jesus recognized her gift. He proclaimed, *“The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together.”*

Jesus saw that single mother and her teen age son come to church that day, too. He recognized the effort it took for her to get her son up that morning and bring him to church. No, she probably didn’t put as many bucks into the collection plate as Mr. CEO, but recognized her extraordinary effort. And Jesus felt her loneliness. He was touched by her courage to be there that day.

This is a picture of a new religious statue in the town of Davidson, N.C., is unlike anything you might see in church.

The statue depicts Jesus as a vagrant sleeping on a park bench. St. Alban's Episcopal Church installed the homeless Jesus statue on its property in the middle of an upscale neighborhood filled with well-kept townhomes.

Jesus is huddled under a blanket with his face and hands obscured; only the crucifixion wounds on his uncovered feet give him away.

The reaction was immediate. Some loved it; some didn't.

"One woman from the neighborhood actually called police the first time she drove by," says David Boraks, editor of DavidsonNews.net. "She thought it was an actual homeless person."

That's right. Somebody called the cops on Jesus.

"Another neighbor, who lives a couple of doors down from the church, wrote a letter to the editor for the local paper saying it creeps him out," Some neighbors feel that it's an insulting depiction of the son of God, and that what appears to be a hobo curled up on a bench demeans the neighborhood.

But think about it. Isn't this a more accurate depiction of who Jesus is than those pictures of blue-eyed Jesuses without a hair on their heads out of place?

This is the picture of Jesus we read about today. This is a Jesus that notices our weak places, those parts of us that are impoverished, whether it be the lack of money, or friends, or love. Jesus goes farther than that. We read in the Hebrews text that Jesus comes right where we are and takes on our pains and burdens. Jesus, like those widows, gave his all. He gave his all on the cross for us. It says, *"he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself."*

Jesus is our widow. His willing obedience to God gives us the confidence of salvation which calls us away from the slavery to this world's demons to look out for each other.

Because of Jesus' love for us, we are empowered to notice the poor widows around us and to reach out to help each other. It is about being in community with each other. Celebrating together and feeling each other's pain.

Today we are celebrating. We are celebrating new things happening in our congregation. There's the wedding that blew our minds. We celebrate with Gina and Joe. As a community we join together to support them and encourage them in their marriage.

We celebrate three baptisms. Today we stand with these children and their parents as they become God's children and members of our community. We promise to support them and help their parents in teaching them about God's love. When we read our parts in the baptisms today, listen carefully to what we are pledging to do for these children.

Today we celebrate as six young people come forward to take their first communion. In a little while you will hear the testimonies of these youth as they express their desire to be a part of Jesus' holy meal. We, as a community have placed in their hands, the Holy Scripture. We share Christ's very life with them.

As a community of God's children we are equipped to notice the poor. That is God's Work and our hands are to be used to reach out and touch the poor homeless Jesus on the park bench, feeling their pain and loving them. Because of all Jesus gave for us, what are we willing to give to Jesus?

Amen

The following is the Veterans' day prayer we prayed at the end of the service:

VETERAN'S PRAYER

"Dear Lord, Today we honor our veterans, worthy men and women who gave their best when they were called upon to serve and protect their country. We pray that you will bless them, Lord, for their unselfish service in the continual struggle to preserve our freedoms, our safety, and our country's heritage, for all of us. Bless them abundantly for the hardships they faced, for the sacrifices they made, for their many different contributions to America's victories over tyranny and oppression. We respect them, we thank them, we honor them, we are proud of them, and we pray that you will watch over these special people and bless them with peace and happiness. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen."