

24th Sunday After Pentecost
November 8, 2015
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, IA
Rev. Amy Larson

Scripture passages for the day:
1 Kings 17:8-16
Psalm 146
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44

[Click here to read scripture passages](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

The widow in our Gospel story today gave her *whole life* to the temple.

The translation of scripture that we just heard uses the phrase “she gave all she had”, but the original Greek says that she gave her whole life. She entrusted God and her religious community with her life.

That is beautiful, but it feels a little extreme.

Was it really wise?

- Jesus was just talking about widow’s houses being devoured by religious elites.
- If that kind of thing was going on, was it really smart for a widow to give everything to a religious institution?
- The Hebrew Bible emphasizes God’s special concern for vulnerable widows and directs God’s people to live out that care and concern - but would they really do that?
- Could she really trust that she would be OK?

We never come across this woman again in scripture so we don’t know how it all went for her.

We too are each invited to trust God completely and give God our whole lives, but that can feel a bit extreme and this Gospel story doesn’t give us a lot to go on.

Why did this woman give her whole life? How did she do it? What did it feel like? And how did it go?

As we think about God's invitation to trust and give freely of our lives, I think the story about a faithful widow in our first lesson today gives us a fuller picture than the little glimpse of the faithful widow in the temple.

Our first lesson tells the story of a widow who was literally starving to death. She was gathering sticks to prepare the last of her food so that she and her son could eat a final meal together before they died. Then a stranger came along and asked her to give him some bread.

Was it wise to share the last scraps of food she had? Was that faithful to her dying son? She didn't think so.

She told him, "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."

She had real concerns and she expressed them.

Notice what happened next.

This stranger, who turned out to be God's prophet Elijah, didn't critique her for this. He didn't express judgment or frustration that she wasn't willing to blindly give him her last bit of food.

Instead, he promised her that God was about to do something wondrous and that she could take part in it by giving what she had. He spoke words of promise from God saying "do not be afraid, 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."

The widow trusted this promise and gave what she had, she entrusted her life to God. As she did, she got to participate in what God was doing and her needs were met.

We're told - "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." The widow went from being a victim to becoming an

agent of God's work of feeding the prophet Elijah. And she and her son were fed.

The good news of this story, and the good news of Jesus, is that God is up to wondrous things in this world and we get to participate. God is at work feeding, healing, loving and transforming the world and God uses us as agents of this work.

We don't have to live as victims, at the mercy of what we lack.

No matter how meager or abundant our resources - our money, time, energy, power, health, or faith - God can and does work through us.

Popular wisdom in our culture is that if we don't have enough of something we'd better hold on tight to what we have and work like crazy to make sure that we get enough. Then and only then can we share what we have.

This isn't actually a wise way to live. All the great wisdom traditions advise against it. Grasping, hoarding and refusing to share doesn't work out well for us or our society. This is a soul crushing way to live.

We become victims of our fear of scarcity and miss the opportunity to participate in what God is doing around us.

This is a lesson I learned as my dad was battling cancer.

I shared this story when I was up at Luther, too. I come back to it often because it still serves as a reminder to me of what I might miss if I focus on what I lack.

My mom had died a few years earlier and dad needed lots of help, but I had a 4-year-old son, a 10-week-old daughter and a full-time job at Luther. I drove up to the Twin Cities to help my dad as often as I could but I was often fixated on how much I had to do in such a limited amount of time.

One night about 11 pm, I was standing at the kitchen sink at dad's house doing the dishes. They were the only thing standing between me and sleep after a long day caring for dad and baby Abby. She was asleep in her porta crib, but not for long, and I was bone weary.

Midway through the dishes, dad called to me from the family room, "Honey, you haven't stopped moving all day!" I yelled back, "Oh, no problem, dad. I always do my dishes at this hour at home." I hoped this would help him feel better about all he was asking of me; and it also happened to be true.

There was a long pause, a very long pause. Then he tried again, being more explicit about what he needed. His voice cracked as he asked, "will you come sit with me?"

Sit? All I wanted to do was crash into sleep. How could he ask something more of me? But I took a deep breath, wiped away the tears, and went to sit down.

As I sat down next to him, dad flashed me a huge smile. He asked me about work and listened to my answers. He told me what he'd noticed about Abby and her brother Nathan. He shared stories about me as a kid. I was at peace for the first time in months. I left the dishes for the morning.

In the remaining months of my dad's life, he continued to call me into the family room to be with him. I didn't always get that joyful smile and great conversation, sometimes he was groggy and grumpy, often I was.

Still, I got to participate in God's work of bringing healing to my dad. In the process I was also healed.

My dad also got to be the one who spoke God's invitation to me, just as Elijah called the widow to trust and give. Dad's call wasn't quite as explicit but I'm certain God was work-ing through my dad to get through to me.

God is always working through us and through our family, friends, co-workers, and strangers to draw us all into God's wisdom of trust and abundance.

God is always working through us and others to provide for us.

God also comes through scripture speaking words of promise like those given to the widow - "do not be afraid", "do not worry about tomorrow", "you shall not be in want."

And most of all, God comes to us in Jesus, the one who gave of his very life, all that he had, so that we could experience and be drawn into God's healing and life-giving work.

Jesus comes to us today to say "this is my body given for you, this is my blood shed for you." This food will not run out, this meal will not fail; we have all that we need.

We can entrust our lives to God. I can't wait to see what God will do in and for us all.

Thanks be to God.