

Sermon for Sunday, November 18, 2018

“We’re Fed as We Give”

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
November 18, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#) (Scriptures for the 25th Sunday were used.)

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

Jesus calls our attention to a widow who gives her whole life. That isn't clear in the English translation, but that's what the original Greek implies. Jesus isn't just talking about money, He's calling our attention to a woman who offers her whole self to God.

We are all called to entrust our lives to God, and this woman does something beautiful and Christ-like by giving of herself so fully. Yet I wonder if it is wise for a widow to give everything to God by way of what had become a corrupt religious institution? Especially because Jesus has just been talking about religious leaders who are devouring widows' houses, exploiting them. Will she be a victim of those leaders? We never come across this woman again in scripture, and we don't know how it all went for her. There are so many questions here.

So, today as we think about God's invitation to trust and give freely, I find the story of a widow in our first lesson much more helpful. It gives us a fuller picture of trusting and giving.

We hear the story of a widow who is literally starving to death at a time of drought. She is gathering sticks to prepare the last of her food so that she and her son can eat a final meal together before they die. Then a stranger comes along and asks her to make him some bread.

Is it wise to share the last of what she has? Is that faithful to her dying son? She doesn't think so and she says as much. She tells Elijah she has only enough for one last meal for the two of them. She has real concerns and she expresses them.

Notice what happens next.

This stranger, who turns out to be God's prophet Elijah, doesn't critique her, he isn't frustrated that she won't just blindly give him her last bit of food.

Instead, he promises her that God is about to do something wondrous and that she can take part in it by giving freely of what she has.

He speaks 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 trusts this promise and gives what she has; she entrusts her life to God.

As she does, she gets to participate in what God is doing and her needs are 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 becomes no longer just a victim of the drought, but rather an agent of God's work of feeding the prophet Elijah. And she and her son are 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, God can and does work through us. God can and does work through you.

Yet, so often we feel we are lacking when it comes to time, money, energy, power, health, or faith. Our culture tells us that we don't have enough, that we aren't enough. We'd better hold on tight to what we have and work like crazy to make sure that we get more and more and more. Only when we have a whole lot 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 don'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.

I believe that's why God asks us to give of our very selves for God's work of loving the world. As we give, we find that our needs are met as well. We are fed and nourished. We are set free from our fear of scarcity. God asks us to give because it helps us and the world.

Even still, it is hard to give, hard to trust. So, God comes to us as other people who ask for our help, who invite our giving. God comes to us 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 gives his very life, all that he has, so that we can 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.