

PENTECOST 25
1 KINGS 17:8-16
HEBREWS 9:24-28
MARK 12:38-44
NOVEMBER 10, 11, 2018

YEAR B

The beginning verses from Mark's gospel and our reading from 1 Kings 17 might cause some to wonder about church leaders. These verses might cause us to wonder about what is right and good as we relate to leaders of the faith. Each of these Bible readings tell about leaders that seem to be seeking the prominent places and to be honored. To be honest, I usually take a good look at myself whenever I read these verses from Mark 12. I most often wear long white robes when we gather for our church services. Our prayers are sometimes long. I am often greeted with respect when I go to various places. Sometimes I am invited to go first at meals and am given the best seat at those meals. Some might say that I preach longer sermons than other preachers. Our initial reading of these Bible lessons for this day cause us to be wonder about what is important. We might think about our own experiences in church and wonder what is right and what is wrong.

A couple of weeks ago we had a catch up day and a tithing day. The intent of that day was to focus on our relationship with God. We also thought about the financial situation of our congregation. It was not about threatening or about forcing anyone to give to the church. It was about renewing our commitment to the Lord and to Our Savior's. It might have been interpreted as the preacher and the leaders asking for money. We did that but I hope it was more about trusting in the Lord with all parts of our lives. It was about supporting the church as we seek to serve the Lord.

1 Kings 17:10 So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink."

Elijah was a fugitive running from King Ahab and Jezebel. God directed him to a widow in Zarephath who was to feed him. Elijah went to the widow and asked for food. The problem was that the woman was down to her last bit of flour and had only a small amount of oil. The woman believed she was about to prepare a last meal for herself and her son. The woman believed that this would be their last meal before starving to death. Even if she wanted to give food and drink she could not because she had no provisions. Elijah was asking for something the woman could not provide. He asked for something she did not have. Elijah listened to the woman. He heard her desperation, but Elijah was persistent in this request for food and drink. "Do as you have said but feed me first."

We read these verse from 1 Kings 17 and are immediately drawn to those that are sometimes seen as invisible in society. We read about those that are most vulnerable. In these readings today widows are lifted up. Widows and orphans were the most vulnerable and invisible in that society as is often the case today. The widow and her son were down to their last meal. They had no one to care for them and no one to provide for them. The widow would soon discover that God is a gracious and a giving God. God provides when we cannot provide for ourselves. God often sends us out to care for needy people because we have been blessed. God sent Elijah to the woman so that Elijah would have food to eat. Because Elijah went to the woman she also was provided for.

1 Kings 17: 13 **Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son.**

Into their vulnerability comes to message of Elijah. The widow was helpless to change her situation but Elijah asks her to not be afraid. There are other times in the Bible when people are encouraged to not be afraid. Abraham is to not be afraid to trust God when Abraham has no child in his old age. The angel appeared to the Virgin Mary asking her to not be afraid. The angel also appeared to Joseph asking him to not be afraid. The disciples were to not be

afraid when Jesus came walking on the water. In the upper room following the crucifixion and resurrection the ten that were gathered to told to not be afraid when Jesus entered the room even when the doors were locked.

Elijah encouraged the widow to not be afraid. Elijah asked her to go ahead and bake bread but to feed him first. We might wonder about this. Why does he get to eat first? Why is Elijah so special that he gets to eat before the woman and her son? I think this story is not only a story about trusting the word of God that comes through God's messengers but also it is a story about our faith. How much to I trust God with life and my resources? It is also a story for the church to listen to.

Mark 12:41, 42 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

Jesus told the crowds that were gathered to beware of the scribes. The scribes were the leaders and the experts of the Hebrew scriptures. The scribes were responsible for giving a right teaching in the synagogue. When offering a teaching in the synagogue they often quoted the respected scribes of ages past. Jesus warns the crowds to beware of them. It was not so much about the words spoken but the attitude from which they were spoken. They wanted to be noticed by their fine words. They wanted people to greet them with respect in the marketplace and they looked forward to the best seats in the house at banquets. They speak all the right words while devouring widow's houses. The scribes Jesus speaks of were in it for the praise and honor they would receive. They were in it for what they would receive. In our time we might say that they were in it for the money. Their message was a "me first" kind of message instead of a "God first" message.

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury. He observed what was put in but also how it was given. I doubt the amount given was as important as the attitude

with which it was given. Mark tells us that the rich were putting in large sums of money. I wonder if they made sure everyone knew how much was given. I also wonder if they made a contest about it. Yet Jesus commented on a widow that gave two copper coins worth a penny. Our Lord commented that she gave more than the others since this was all she had.

You might wonder about her sanity of giving everything into the treasury. We also might wonder at the sanity of the widow who fed Elijah before feeding herself and her son. Why and how could and would they do this? It is about trusting in the word of the Lord and the messengers from God. It is about believing the word of God through Elijah that says here flour and oil would not run out before the rains came again. It is the belief that God will provide. Do I trust the Lord enough to give what I have even if it is very little? Elijah asked the widow to give to him first trusting in the promise of God. The widow in Mark 12 gave everything she had giving her first and her best for service to the Lord. As people of God we give our first fruits and our best fruits to the Lord. We trust God with what we have given because we believe the Lord will use our gifts to care for others. The amount is not as important as trusting God with our lives.

1 Kings 17:15, 16 She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah. AMEN