

## Pastor Jon's All Saints Day Sermon 2021

As we remember the saints in our lives this day, both past and present, we hear the message in our lessons today that, "The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down."

And on this Annual Congregational Meeting day, how appropriate would it be if we meditated on this line from Psalm 146 in the coming year. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.

Are you feeling bowed down lately? I feel like each of us is going through something right now that causes us to lose sleep at night or bow our heads either in grief or in prayer. But the scripture says, "The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down."

Story 2 people on Friday who are feeling bowed down.

In our first lesson and the Gospel, we meet two widows who are living close to the cuff. In first Kings, we meet a widow from Zarephath, who is living in a time of drought. She and her son are down to their last jar of meal and little bit of oil. Her plan was to make some bread, eat their last meal together, and die. But God had other plans for her. God warned the widow that a stranger would be coming and she was to feed him.

Would you share your last bit of food with a stranger in need if you were in need yourself? We tend to put our needs first and then share out of our abundance if we have it. At a time in our world today when we hear of food prices rising and shortages because of shipping and employment breakdowns, we are more into stock piling items in our homes.

In our first lesson, this was an extraordinary act of faith by the widow to share all she had with a stranger. The prophet Elijah was that stranger and said to the widow, "Do not be afraid." The widow followed through on baking a cake for Elijah. As a result of her faith and action, she and continued to eat, and miraculously, the jar of meal was not emptied and the jug of oil did not fail as Elijah promised. Did I mention that she was a foreigner to Elijah and Elijah to her. People of Zaraphath were Gentiles and didn't mix with Jews.

What was God up to in matching these two people in need who had great theological and social differences? When people are in need, all walls are torn down. In the end, God blessed this relationship and the generosity of the widow.

Then in our Gospel from Mark, Jesus is about to cleanse the temple and turn over the tables of the money changers. But first, he calls out the religious leaders in the temple who show empty acts of piety in public. The scribes and pharisees were tooting their own horn when they give money, they wear long robes and say long prayers in public just for show. To Jesus faith is about the double commandment of loving God and loving our neighbor. It's not about public displays of "look at me" or abuses of power.

Jesus sees the injustice happening in the temple and how his childhood faith is devouring widow's households. He turns to his disciples and sees a widow giving two copper coins... all she had. Jesus points her out because her last two coins, proportionately were way more than the religious leaders were giving out of their abundance. She gave even as she was in poverty. This is about being all in for God and trusting in God to provide. The widow knew what it was like to be cared for by others. Her two coins weren't going to make a difference on the grand scale to the temple treasury. But it made a difference for her to give. She didn't know anyone was looking.

Small acts of generosity add up. It is the little bits of kindness that you give or that others give to you that make you pause. Saying a kind word. Picking a gift off the giving tree for Christmas. Giving a few cans of food to the food pantry all add up. You might not think your gifts or kind words don't matter much, but they do.

Many scholars compare this story of Jesus lifting up this woman's offering to his work on the cross. Jesus gave all of himself for us, for the forgiveness of our sins, for the promise of eternal life. He showed us what true generosity looks like.

May God lift up those who are bowed down and may we respond to God's gift in Jesus with kindness and generosity toward others.

Amen