

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, November 10, 2024.

“Trusting God in Times of Uncertainty”

Based on 1 Kings 17:8-16, Psalm 146, and Hebrews 9:24-28.

In our lessons for today, widows are mentioned 3 times. My daughter once answered a teacher when asked what do you want to be when you grow up? She confidently said, “A widow”. Why is that the teacher asked? “Because I don’t want to get married and I want to travel the world.” The teacher let us know so we can work on the definition of a widow at home.

A lot of times in the Bible you see the language of widows and orphans paired together. Widows and orphans were considered the most vulnerable people in society. They were of special moral concern for the church. You often see the construction of the two together in the Psalms and prophets. Widows had very little legal standing and financial stability without an adult male to care for them. But that wasn’t always the case. Some widows were business people like Lydia who was a dealer in purple cloth in the book of Acts. But most widows faced an uncertain future.

Speaking of uncertain futures, I spoke to many of you this week after the election. I know some of you are hurting deeply over the results and some are pleased with the results. This is a time to be gentle with each other and to acknowledge that any time we are thrown into a transition we face some uncertainty together.

So, what can we learn from two unnamed widows in our first lesson and the Gospel today? They demonstrated faith and trust in God to provide for them when faced with an uncertain future.

In our first lesson, we meet the widow of Zarephath and her son. Zarephath was Gentile territory near Sidon... the coast of modern-day Lebanon. The people worshipped the god Baal... the god of storms. She would be considered a foreigner to a Jewish person like Elijah and vice versa. They certainly would not mix in public. The widow and her son lived during a terrible drought. Food and water was scarce. But like a matchmaker, God commanded the widow to feed the Prophet Elijah when he comes to town. And God

told the prophet Elijah to go and live in Zarephath and look for the widow that God commanded to feed him. But there was a problem, she and her son were down to their last morsels of meal in a jar and oil. She was going to prepare one last meal, eat it, and die. When Elijah met her at the city gate, she was gathering sticks to make a fire for her last supper. Elijah said, before you go and do that, bring me a little water and cake and then make something for your son. “For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: the jar of meal will not be emptied and the just of oil will not fail until the day the Lord sends rain upon the earth.” And sure enough, she did as she was told and everyone ate their fill. The jar of meal was not emptied, and the oil did not fail as Elijah said.

In Psalm 146, we are reminded that our ultimate trust should be placed in the Lord our God who made the heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them... and not in mortals and princes in whom there is no help. This Praise Psalm gives us a window into God’s heart and gives us our job description as people of faith. It says, The Lord our God executes justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord will set the prisoners free; the Lord will open the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord watches over the strangers; upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked the Lord will bring to ruin. If God cares about these things, we the church should too. Regardless of which mortals are elected, our job is still the same... to seek justice for the oppressed and to lift up those who are bowed down.

Finally in our Gospel, Jesus compares the offering of a widow to that of the scribes in the temple to teach about discipleship. The scribes practiced their religion with a desire for praise and respect... wearing long robes and sitting in the best seats in the synagogue and saying long prayers. Jesus says, they devour widow’s households. But when Jesus observes a widow giving two coins equaling 1 penny... all that she had... he points out... there it is. That’s it. That’s your model of discipleship. The widow quietly gave an offering that was greater than all others because she gave her whole living. In other words, Jesus doesn’t just want a portion of our life, he wants all of it... 100%. Not just when it looks good for us, or we get credit or praise. Jesus wants

us to practice our faith and discipleship even when no one is looking. She gave everything she had. She trusted in God to provide for her when she faced the uncertainty of having nothing. May we learn to trust and hope in the abundance of God like these widows even during our times of uncertainty.

Jesus pointing out the widow's offering really foreshadows the gift that Jesus will give to all of us on the cross. He will give his very life for us and for the world. His act of giving will open for us the way to forgiveness, eternal life and salvation... and it will never run out. He with us to the end of the age. This is most certainly true. Amen.