

Pastor Roy's Sermon from November 8, 2015 (Harvest Home)

24 - I Kings 17:8-16; Mark 12:38-44 Children's lesson: Harvest Home day. Why do we share?

Faith is trusting that all of my resources will be enough in God's care. There will be enough food. There will be enough shelter. Enough warmth. Enough strength to work. Enough time to work and rest. Enough friendship. Enough beauty. Enough health. Enough Life. Enough of these to give as much as we receive.

Our temptation is to keep more than enough back for ourselves, because it's easier to trust in our own resources than in the generosity of God and others. After all, it is easier to give than to receive. The widow of Zarephath and the widow in the temple remind us that generosity improves our quality of life.

The widow of Zarephath gives one meal, of the last of her food, to Elijah. She lives in a culture of sharing. Why should she live a few more days and this holy prophet die sooner? They might share a meal and if they die, she is not alone with her son. Or perhaps there would be a miracle according to the prophet's promise and they would all survive. Either way, she was doing a good thing. She was in the hands of God. That was a good place to be.

This is a miracle story. It is a reminder that when we are faithfully generous, miracles happen. It might not be grain and oil which increase in volume before your very eyes, but every time we share a miracle happens. The hungry are fed and our fear shrinks. Trust is a discipline. Faith grows with practice.

The widow at the temple does likewise. She gives with unbelievable generosity trusting that God will take care of her. Why give to the temple? The leaders of the temple were not hungry. They did not wear tattered clothes. There was gold here and there. Was that a touch of arrogance she noticed on some faces? Surrounding such important conversations? Is it worth it to support this temple? Is God here more than in any other place and dwelling?

But in her world, how else might she give above and beyond her common life to show her love for God and her beloved community. The temple was such a center piece of their life together and experience of God's mercy and her hope.

So she set aside her concerns and put the small copper coins in with the other money. Surely her gift would make a difference in some way, it was important, even if just to her.

Compare these widows with the religious leaders of their day. Elijah was just as poor as the widow in the gentile community. They were in this together, sharing faith and resources.

Not all of the scribes in Jesus' day were greedy and without compassion. Jesus warns his disciples and perhaps the crowd to beware the religious leaders who are all about themselves rather than mercy and generosity. Our translations imply with their commas that all of the scribes were like that, but clearly such generalizations run counter to the gospel of second and 70 x 7 chances for renewal. Seeds planted in love, sprouting from a place of openness to God's peace. No one is beyond that mercy. God's love is at work by the Spirit in all people, in all of creation. No exceptions. Not even the Scribes were beyond the working of the Spirit of God.

The contrast is pretty sharp, though in Mark. We are invited to consider whether we act like poor generous widows, or others filled with pride and greed—those who stand condemned by their lack of love and trust.

Which are we? Freedom and joy are not found in stockpiles, but in joyful surrender to God's mercy.

So this week, let us practice the discipline of generosity and watch our faith grow. Amen.