

Liturgical Date/Readings: Proper 27, Year B: Mark 12:38-44

Date: November 10, 2024

Homilist: The Rev. Alanna M. Van Antwerpen

Community: 10:00am Christ Church Episcopal, Exeter, NH

Sources: “Feasting on the Word” YB Vol. 4; TEC Genesis Conference Boston 2024

The word of God sustains us: yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

As we gather today there are many things on our hearts and minds. Some may feel a sense of relief, and joy; others may feel a sense of frustration and hopelessness. Both the church responds: the word and ritual of God is the same nourishment for us yesterday, today and tomorrow.

2,000 years ago, a woman went to worship at a temple and we are still talking about her today. The poor widow brings her offering to the temple treasury, out of her poverty she gave abundantly. Jesus again reminds us that we too are called to give, not out of our abundance, but out of those hard places, those places that stretch us, that remind us that we are reliant on God’s love and nourishment in our lives. Jesus urges us to give from the places that are uncomfortable for us to building up the kingdom of God.

Much has been said about this passage in relationship to stewardship. A critique of the church’s use of this passage is that it has been seen as a mechanism for exploitation of those who are poor and marginalized to give *even* more. So today let us hear this message as an invitation from God for us to look at ourselves first. Today, God invites us to step back, take the balcony view, and look at the ways in which perhaps the church as an institution or our giving does not meet the mark of the righteousness of this widow. In biblical terms righteousness means nothing less than our willingness to care for the most vulnerable people instead of preserving ourselves at the expense of others. This type of sacrificial giving moves us from calculating giving out of our abundance to giving without calculating the cost, out of our poverty like the poor widow.

And so today, I invite you to think about how God is calling you in your life to give out of your poverty. For many of us giving materially can be calculated into our monthly or weekly budget. Yet, what *cannot* be calculated is the challenge we feel in the work that is set before us, whether it be to love our neighbor as ourselves, to work towards or at least acknowledge bridging the divisions among us, living into the risky confidence that God’s grace and power can surprise even in the most stressful situations. What cannot be calculated is how each of us is invited to do the hard work of taking a moral inventory in the ways in which we feel impoverished and ill equipped for the work of building up God’s kingdom here and now.

Recently I was at a conference where people who are doing ‘church start-ups’ or ‘church plants’ like SpiritBound Digital Mission gathered. I invite you to the adult forum after worship to hear more about SpiritBound and the Spirit Chats movement. At this conference one of our speakers, Ann Steigerwald, a spiritual director, coaching consultant, and lay Franciscan spoke about the trap of “competency.” She spoke about how competency can get in the way of building meaningful partnerships in ministry. She named that, relying on our own competency can lead

us to thinking we do not need anyone else and fall into the trap of mistaking our value for that. In our Gospel passage today, Jesus points out the competency of the scribes, walking around in their long robes, having the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets.

Ann then spoke about St. Francis of Assisi. As a lay Franciscan, she has let many pilgrimages to the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi Italy. She said one of the most moving pieces of art in the Basilica is a fresco painting depicting St. Francis' devotion to lady poverty. The painting depicts St. Francis being wed to Lady Poverty.

When Ann spoke about this, she dug a little bit deeper demystifying the romanticism of living in poverty, but rather challenging us to consider in what ways are we called to really understand that poverty as a spiritual practice engages those places in which we feel impoverished in ourselves. When we do this, acknowledging our own poverty or lack of 'knowing it all' 'having it all' 'or being perfect at it all' we open a new pathway. This pathway calls us forward into interdependence, into mutuality, into realizing that we depend on each other or as our Book of Common Prayer says, "that our common life depends on each other's toil." In this way, the depiction of St. Francis with Lady Poverty moves from objectifying this practice to cherishing God's invitation to love, cherish, and honor the desolate, sometimes difficult places within us as we give from our own poverty to rely on God's grace and transformative presence.

So today as we once again see the witness of this poor widow, let us be called to act as honestly as she does in her faithfulness to God. As Biblical Theologian Emile Townes offers us a new perspective on the coins saying, "The coins represent faith-filled offering found in presenting all of who we are and all we hope to become to God for service in the world." So today let us live into that ever-challenging witness, that no matter what is happening in the world, our servant leadership for Christ's mission in the world does not change. Today Jesus reminds us once again that we cannot depend on human built systems to bring about the kingdom of God. It is the work of the community of faith, living into the vulnerability of giving out of our poverty that will bring us closer to God and to one another.

We come together to be nourished by the word of God, just as our ancestors were.

We come together remembering that God's life and love is eternal, and everlasting.

We come together being fed and nourished as we are once more called out back into the world to be agents of healing and resurrection hope: yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Amen.