



daileystory@gmail.com

November 11, 2018
Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 27)



Scripture Readings

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17 Psalm 127
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark: 12:38-44

The Gospel isn't meant to be gulped down on Sunday morning, but gnawed on through the week so it really becomes a part of us. You've got to work at it, like a dog with a good bone! Here's a reflection on the Gospel for this coming Sunday — the twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost — with food for thought about how we use the power we have. Gnaw away!

In today's text we see a familiar sight: privileged people with power discussing matters of import. Alongside them is a person in the distress of poverty, and in poverty is giving coppers to places that the wealthy benefit from, but do not contribute to.

'The Widow's Mite' is often used as a way of recognizing the generosity of the poor, calling on those who have little to nonetheless give the little they have for the payback of recognition. There is — or at least, there may be — virtue in this reading. However, for today's reflection we are going to trouble the regularly received wisdom of this reading, causing some conflict of interpretation of the text.

Regular reception of this text implies that she's praised:

- Because she gave all, she's praised.
- Because she gave until she had little — or nothing — left, she's praised.

- Because of the spirit in which she gave she's praised.
- Give according to your means, and she did this, so she's praised.
- Give until it hurts; she did this, and is praised.

However, this automatic assumption of praise of the widow is problematic.

Reading Jesus' words again:

"Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

We see no indication of praise.

Certainly Jesus isn't condemning her, but he isn't praising her either.

He's **noticing** her. And he's noticing her in the context of having just said:

"...they devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

We have here the harsh language of Jesus towards those in power who devour the houses of widows, in the name of their great appearance.

So the point of this text isn't to say that the widow is doing a great thing, but that the authorities are doing awful things. It is possible to read this text through the lens of proclaiming that she was a victim of those who stood idly by, seeing the evidence that their distance created, but doing nothing to intervene. Perhaps Jesus wanted someone to put their hand into the treasury box, remove some coins, and give them back to her, from whom much had already been taken.

This widow is not setting an example to be imitated; but neither are the authorities. In this context we see Jesus exacerbating conflict: building it up, seeing something that's received as a demonstration of the 'generosity of the poor' and reading the deeper truth of exploitation beneath the received narrative. The widow has been asked to give the little she has to something that is going to fail, and she does this, to the betterment of

the already bettered, and the detriment of her meagre finances. This is a failure of moral authority, as well as pragmatism.

Often it seems in circles of faith that we are moved towards deescalating conflict; when in this text we see Jesus escalating it, amplifying it in the civic conversation, rather than hiding it.

She is not praised, she is not to be imitated. She is a warning to leaders that they need to consider the dark side of the devotion they evoke. The power of their words can make the poor poorer, and make them think that this is something praiseworthy, when in fact such civic manipulations in the name of religion are condemnable not commendable.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Tuesday we were back to ads for windows and attorneys rather than the political. Amen to that!

American politics and American religion are equally dualistic. You are either Republican or Democrat. You are either conservative or liberal. You are either Catholic or Protestant, either evangelical or progressive. Politics and religion treat life as oppositional, about the positions you hold, the thoughts you have. But as my second-favorite bumper sticker advises, "Don't believe everything you think." (My favorite bumper sticker is, "God is NOT a Republican ... or a Democrat.")

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Will dualistic thinking make us better or worse Christians? I am convinced that God cares far less about any particular position I hold than God does about the way I engage the people around me. Whether I love. In fact, Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their dualistic approach to religion. *Love God*, Jesus confounded them. I don't recall Jesus ever saying, *be right*, but he did say, *love your neighbor*. Paul observed that being Christian has *everything to do* with the approach you take to those around you: *Love does not insist*

upon its own way, after all. And James, pure and undefiled religion is [an action:] to care for orphans and widows (those in need) and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

~~~~~

We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses," says the author of the letter to the Hebrews after recounting the history of the servants of God, "let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."

~~~~~

The beneficent cloud of witnesses (*I like to call it my balcony*) gazes at each of us out of the love manifest in resting in God. Who are your saints, spiritual ancestors who, directly or indirectly, have guided your path. Pay attention to them in prayer, with gratitude. They support you, delight in you and applaud you as you run the race set before you. And today the veil between the worlds is very thin.

Terry Gross on PBS: I am more radio listener than a TV person and the following was an interview I listened to on my way home from choir Monday evening. I expect you could find the show to listen yourself if you have access to podcasts.

Why is religion still around in the twenty-first century? Why do so many still believe? And how do various traditions still shape the way people experience everything from sexuality to politics, whether

they are religious or not? In *Why Religion?* Elaine Pagels looks to her own life to help address these questions.

These questions took on a new urgency for Pagels when dealing with unimaginable loss—the death of her young son, followed a year later by the shocking loss of her husband. Here she interweaves a personal story with the work that she loves, illuminating how, for better and worse, religious traditions have shaped how we understand ourselves; how we relate to one another; and, most importantly, how to get through the most difficult challenges we face.

Drawing upon the perspectives of neurologists, anthropologists, and historians, as well as her own research, Pagels opens unexpected ways of understanding persistent religious aspects of our culture. A provocative and deeply moving account from one of the most compelling religious thinkers at work today, *Why Religion?* explores the spiritual dimension of human experience

The Marsh Kings Daughter by a Shelby Twp. author is an excellent read—as is *Truly Madly Guilty* by Liane Moriarty.

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

-Sir Winston Churchill

* * * * *

The most costly gift is valueless, if there is no love in the giving.

The cheapest gift is priceless, if it comes from the love which could give no more.

-William Barclay

* * * * *

“the world is now too dangerous for anything but truth, too small for anything but love.”

-William Sloane Coffin