

The First Congregational Church of Plainfield

November 8, 2015

Sermon Title: "Utter Trust"

1 Kings 17:8-16 (NRSV)

The Widow of Zarephath

8 Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 9 "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." 10 So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." 11 As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." 12 But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." 13 Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." 15 She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. 16 The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

Mark 12:38-44

Jesus Denounces the Scribes

As he taught, he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

The Widow's Offering

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, '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.'

The two stories today are about poor widows trusting God with all they have in the world. The stories are even more remarkable when we consider that women who were widowed in biblical times found themselves in a difficult situation. Without a husband, they were at the mercy of the adult males of their family (if they had any) to care for them and hopefully they would also receive mercy from others especially in their faith community. Many widows were expected to marry again very quickly to a male relative of their deceased spouse - usually a brother or cousin and again if there was one.

I can't help but wonder why they had such utter trust. How could the widow give Elijah the last of her food - the little bit of meal and oil she had - in the midst of a severe drought when she had a son to feed? Her words sound pitiful and desperate - "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Yet she trusts that God will not fail her and does what Elijah asks. Then there is the widow that Jesus observes at the temple treasury. She gave pennies but that was more to her than the large amounts that others gave. What drove them both to be so trusting?

Jesus warns what to watch out for and what not to become. He says 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! It all comes down to intent. God knows the heart; there is no pretense when it comes to God. People haven't changed. Maybe the settings change, the generations change but the human heart continues to struggle with truth.

Jesus was frowning upon the "look at me" superficial righteousness. Jesus knew that what the outside said was not what the inside was. They were not authentic, they were not genuine and some of them probably didn't even realize it. Sometimes, we can wear a mask for so long that we can no longer see through it. Jesus teaches about truthfulness throughout his ministry and not just in the spoken word but in the whole of a person - thought, word and deed. On another occasion, Jesus said, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you

hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.”ⁱ God knows when our thoughts, words and deeds are not in harmony. Do we dare to reflect on where we are not in harmony - within and without? Do our words reveal what we hold to be true in our hearts?

Jesus saw the widow's true heart. He saw how she trusted God's will - she trusted with utter complete trust. Most would say that she took great risk but maybe she really didn't see it that way. Maybe with such a solid faith and trust she didn't see it as risk at all. Her contribution monetarily was very little but the willingness of her heart toward God was priceless. In the eyes of those watching at the temple her contribution was laughable. Many might have thought, "Why bother, what good will your pennies do." But they missed the mark because what she gave represented her trust in God's will for her life. She demonstrated a faith that walks in peace even through the valley of the shadow of death.

The widow's offering that day was a prelude to the offering that Jesus was to soon make; the offering of all of himself. Jesus had utter trust in God's faithfulness to carry him through. Who are those in our midst from whom we have much to learn? Remember always that we might be entertaining angels unawares.

Let's think about that. Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 23:27 NIV