

Sermon: Advent 1

The Rev. Kim Hoop

November 11, 2018

Year C

1 Kings 17:8-16

Psalm 127

Hebrews 9:24-28

Mark 12:38-44

A rather stern warning from Jesus to his disciples, telling them to beware of those individuals that paraded around in long robes, had a lot of power and privilege, enjoyed attention, and thought rather highly of themselves and wanted others to do the same. They were wealthy, in positions of trust, demanded respect and unfortunately, many (but not all of the scribes) preyed on the poor and the vulnerable, especially widows. Widows could not inherit property, or work, they had very little if any power and were at the mercy of others to provide for them.

The scribes at the time of Jesus were mainly interpreters and teachers of God's law. In addition, they helped people with finances and other personal matters and although they were not supposed to charge for helping anyone with these things, they were known to somehow get money from widows for everything from advice, to prayers and even took the homes of widows to pay debts left by their deceased husbands or to settle estates.

The scribes, in Jesus' estimation were not following and living out God's laws; that is, to care for the widow, the orphan and the poor. They wanted and cared more for the perks that went along with the title "scribe." Their interests laid more in external things, such as robes, greetings and the best seats. But as John Shea says, on the inside they replaced the love of God and neighbor with the love of self. Egos loomed large.

Jesus was often at odds with the religious authorities of his time, but he actually had the inside view. Jesus could see into their hearts. He knew that not all the inner motivations of the scribes were good or pure. He knew that their motivation was to maintain their wealth and power (or attain more of it), at the expense of others, which in turn created

poverty and other social problems. Perhaps Jesus was upset about the attitude and focus of the scribes, that they focused on themselves and not what was Holy. And, like then, Jesus also sees into the hearts of all people today. Jesus taught that the greatest among us is to be the servant of all. And that to whom much is given, much is required, and that is something that sounds like an accountability piece.

I don't believe that the M.O. of the scribes in Jesus' day died with the Temple. There are individuals and institutions that exploit the poor and vulnerable in our society. We too must beware of scribes today, openly talking about and actively addressing the issues of our time, examining where we put our power and trust and what we focus on as individuals, as a church and as a society. Fr Mike Kinman suggests that we really, "look at how we use our power, do we use it to help others or only advance ourselves?"

Jesus, in the Gospel goes on and makes note of a widow who gives all she has to a Temple system that she most likely knows is flawed. She gave all she had in a tremendous step of faith in God and called it good. Jesus having observed the widows actions may have been lamenting that the widow gave all she had, allowing Temple leaders to live comfortable and wealthy lives. Jesus may not have been upset by the system of giving, and the need to support the temple, but rather a Temple requirement that masked greed.

Gods laws were around long before the Temple was built and these laws included caring for the vulnerable, not expecting them to give up everything they had. The widow sacrificed it all and gave what little power she may have had along with her last two coins to God. Trusting that God would provide for her. Maybe she was sacrificing just as Christ would later do in obedience to God, by giving up all he had (his life) on the cross for a corrupt world.

In our Old Testament lesson we have the story of another widow. The widow of Zarephath, who due to a drought had only a small amount of meal and a little oil. She

and her son were on the brink of starvation. This was her final purchase and she was going to prepare one last meal for herself and her son and then prepare to die. And, along comes Elijah. He asks her for water, and, thank you too much for something to eat. The request according to one commentary may have been the "avenue for which God provided for her and her son." She ends up trusting in Elijah's promise that his God will provide for her if she only fixes the bread and feeds Elijah first. This is quite a step of faith. She is being asked to trust and have faith in a man she has never seen before and in a God who is foreign to her. She was a Canaanite and believed in other gods.

And Elijah, he puts faith in God, believing that God will fulfill his promise that the widow's meal and oil will not run out before the drought ends. She does as Elijah asks and God does provide for her and her son. She acted in faith and sacrificed all she had and ended up with new life through the God of Israel. She had stepped out believing she would be taken care of, even though her sacrifice was not fully to God. She had sacrificed hoping to survive.

In looking at the widow stories I began to wonder if the idea behind those stories is not only about sacrifice, which each widow did, but also about moving out in faith. God loves all of us, but as Fr Kinman reminds us, God uses the most unlikely people to carry out his work. People like Moses, who was reluctant but heard God's call, and David, a shepherd who became king and was part of the lineage of Christ. They listened, heard, and responded to God's call. We, too, need to do the same. For us today moving out in faith might include: Stepping out to address issues like gun violence, hatred and poverty.

Stepping out to take on challenges like making sure that there is affordable housing for people, or that mental health services are in place for those who struggle with addiction or depression, and the list goes on.

We live in a crazy world, pulled one way with all the world has to offer and all its problems, yet knowing there is a God who offers another type of living. Perhaps we as individuals and as a body of faith must listen and respond to Gods call and come forward now, in faith and action..... are we listening? Perhaps God is saying (like the commercial) Can you hear me now?

Kim+