

November 15 2015 Year B Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

**Scripture Lessons ~**

*Psalm 16*

I Kings 17:8-16

Mark 12:38-44

**Sermon**      *Two Widows*

A few years ago on my vacation Sundays, I ended up visiting four different churches. I did two UCC Churches, a Presbyterian Church and a Lutheran Church. As a pastor even though I try to relax and I try to get into the spirit of worship when I have my time off, I am still kind of all eyes and all ears when visiting new congregations. I try to take in everything that I can but one thing that I really do enjoy is when visiting other churches is watching people around me as they give their offering on a Sunday morning. At that point, I am not so much interested in what people give but instead of how they give the gift. Some people for example always place their offering in an envelope boldly marked with all the vital statistics. While others are shyer about it and make no marks whatsoever on the outside and sometimes wrap it up with enough tape to protect Fort Knox. In fact some people in one of my churches put wrapping paper around their envelope, I think just to annoy the financial secretary. I don't know what the point was? Some people preferred to put cash in the plate of course and some boldly slap their bills down open face. While other people sort of fold their bills up into tiny little balls to put them in the offering plate. In my last church in fact the kids started having little contests to see who could fold their bills most creatively. I found a lot of paper airplanes; I found a lot of origami birds and animals and flowers appearing in the offering plates on some Sunday mornings. Invariably you know as I do that somebody was going to throw in a handful of change into the plate and when that clanged, it clanged beside the plate the eyes of the congregation automatically turns to Joe when he does that; and it was just an automatic reaction that you can't help when you know it is coming.

Jesus, in fact, couldn't help doing the same thing on that one day. As the story in Mark's Gospel starts he sitting in one of the temple courtyards in Jerusalem. What is he doing, resting, teaching or was he people watcher? We aren't sure. But one thing we know, for sure, is the fact; he must have been in one of the outer courtyards since there were four courtyards surrounding the temple in Jesus' day. The women were only allowed in the third courtyard from the center. And in that courtyard there were a number, as I mentioned before, were, several trumpet-shaped offering boxes used for collecting voluntary coin offerings for all kinds of sacrificial use in the temple; be it animals, be it incense. Jesus sat across from one

such box, he was just barely aware of the stream of people tossing their coins in the containers. Each made a kind of clanging sound, the bigger the better I suppose. And no doubt many people like it immensely when other people heard just how loud their coins sounded when they hit the box. It wasn't a clanging sound that caught Jesus' ear that day but it was two small clinking noises that were barely auditable when he heard the sound. When he heard the sound, his eye caught sight of a poor frail widow who was quietly but still unashamedly dropping in two thin copper coins in the offering box. They were called Lepta and they were thin and they were small and they were light. And they were only worth a half a cent in today monetary value. But that nearly inaudible sound that those coins made impressed Jesus so much that he felt it necessary to gather his disciples together and share these words that Susan shared with us earlier. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those contributing to the treasury. For all they contributed out of their abundance but she out of her poverty has put in everything that she has—all that she has to live on" Why I wonder did Jesus single out this poor widow and her nearly non-existent gift above all of those people who contributed many, many more coins to the treasury that day. After all in the world where we are we are told that bigger is always better. This is the message we hear everywhere. If you don't toot your own horn nobody else is going to toot it for you. Isn't the size of the gift, isn't it the visibility of what the gift will buy, that is much more important and is what truly counts? Well obviously God, nor I or anyone else would turn down a generous gift that is meant for any good cause whether that cause is large or small. But I believe that Jesus drew attention to this particular woman and her gift because he saw in her barely noticeable action a powerful, powerful object lesson and that lesson is this for those of us who seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth sharing God's love with an often hurting world the way we speak the way we act, the way we live day by day assume three different things.

First of all it assumes that our giving spring forth from our trust; it springs forth from our faith in a loving Creator. Often we hold ourselves and our possession out of fear. I think fear controls a lot of our lives. The fear that we won't have enough for ourselves; the fear is that we won't have enough for our family.

Our other widow from First Kings, the widow from Zarephath had every single reason on God's green earth to be afraid. The fact of her scarce food supply and that she had a small son to feed; yet even in her destitution she went out on a limb and she shared what she had with the prophet Elijah and trusted in God's promise that she would have enough to make it through that drought. The oil and the meal lasted until the rains came. And I can't stand up here and promise any of you that we will have a never ending supply of food or anything else if we trust in God but I know one thing for sure. Our God is good. Our God is love. And because of those

two things God always walks with us in the lean times of life. So we never need to be afraid to share in those lean times. For our faith will lead us to recognize and to celebrate just how God has provided for us and blessed us in countless ways in those lean times.

Secondly sharing in the way Mark's widow shared assumes our giving wells up cheerfully from the very heart of our being. Jesus did not command the poor widow to give all that she had neither did he frighten her or make her feel guilty if she didn't. And we know for certain that she didn't give because how it might look to others because it was that it was plain it didn't. Instead giving cheerfully from the heart we are required of only one motivation; and that is love. A little song that we sometimes sing with clapping comes from First John 4: 19 reminds us how this works. "We love because God first loved us." "We love because God first loved us." The widow I believe and her gift came out of love in return for God's love for her. . I think it is impossible for us to give cheerfully; it is impossible for us to give from the heart unless we are able to recognize God's deep and abiding love for each one of us and the entire world around us in the process.

And third, finally and this is a three-point sermon, by the way; giving in the way the widow gave in Mark's Gospel assumes that our giving costs us something This is the part that pinches. Our giving is sacrificially. Both of our widows separated by hundreds of years lived in times and place where there were no pension plans, where there was no social security or where there were no survivor's benefits. In fact there was very little safety net of any kind for either of these widows. Unless the such a woman's husband had accumulated enough so that he could leave it behind or if she had surviving adult children to care for her; she was pretty much as we say in Whitman County. "Up a creek without a paddle." This is in a world that tells us that and it still boggles my mind that we need at least a million dollars in the bank just so we can retire. I will still be working until I am ninety years old. In a sense then these women seen as non-persons in the world in which they lived. They were completely dependent upon the charity of those around them which made Mark's widow's gift the more remarkable in the eyes of Jesus. Many of us myself included would consider such giving out and out crazy. The sensible human tendency is to hold back, the sensible human tendency is to save so we can provide for our family and our future is secure. God, in fact calls us to be good stewards with the gifts we have been given but the questions remains, how much is enough? In the very light of essence of Jesus' teachings, we as his disciples are called and it seems like the widow we need to ask ourselves the essential question in our lives of faith in whom, does my true security lie? In whom does my true security lie? And we come to same conclusion as did the widow, we will realize that true love, true giving will always cost us something in the end. We

will pinch a little bit. So as everyday followers of Jesus of whom we speak, Jesus, of whom we sing how to share God's love in the world around us.

What can we learn from this tale of two widows? Well first we are called each and every day to trust' and to have faith in a loving God. Secondly we are called to live life with cheerful and generous hearts and finally we are called to live a life that costs us something in the way we speak; in the way we act; and in the way that we live day by day. Otherwise I am truly afraid our giving may not be true giving at all in the end

And together we say AMEN