

The Widow's Might

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This is the season of stewardship. This is the time of the Christian year during which we exam our lives and renew our pledges to keep God first in all things. We've looked at the stewardship of our time, talents and monies. We've looked at the stewardship of our stuff. Today I want us to take a close look at the stewardship of our souls.

This morning we heard a passage from I Kings; a passage in which a widow was asked on behalf of God to feed Elijah. Times for her were hard. Her life was desperate...in fact, she was preparing what she understood to be the final meal for her and her son. "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."

Elijah hungers as well, but his trust in the LORD has already been tested. He assures her that if she bakes food for them all, the LORD will continue to provide and none of them will perish. "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."

This is her time of trial. This is her temptation. What is she to do? Does she give her last morsel of bread and bring certain death to her family? She has nothing. How could God ask her to give at a time like this?

We know what she does. She screws up her courage and out of her convictions gives to Elijah. And she is rewarded with an abundant supply of meal and oil...she is rewarded with life.

I think fair to say that the widow gave out of the poverty of her soul. She had absolutely nothing...save her trust in God. She was prepared for the death of her family and didn't appear to be looking for any miracles. But out of her poverty, she does give of herself, even if it means the death of her own son. In a hopeless, desperate time, she gives all. She has no answers...she cannot envision her own future past this one last meal...but yet she gives.

The Gospel for today reveals to us that same truth about trust in God. "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." Again we see a Godly example of the stewardship of our souls. The widow gave her last two cents and was left with nothing but her trust in God to see her through.



I want us to think for a minute about the widow's might. Take out your bulletin and look for a moment at the cover art. This is a remembrance...an icon if you will, depicting the widows might (might)...how does it speak to you this morning?

Think about the situation in which she gave all, leaving nothing but her own trust in God; Think about the Scribes at the temple where Jesus was teaching- these Scribes who were given to the task of keeping the law of God and interpreting it for His people. And yet Jesus accounts them as not living up to their oaths of obedience. They do not care for the people to whom they are entrusted.

Jesus tells us their greatest aim is fueled by pride, vanity, and the pursuit of wealth. "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers."

This teaching of Jesus reaches much farther than a particular sect of Judaism. How many "Scribes" or people entrusted to similar tasks within Christianity can you think of that abuse their office and feed off the faithful? But yet the widow is not detoured by their actions...she walks through the midst of them and gives her last two cents. She walks through these powerful keepers of the faith with only her trust in God and gives her all.

It is of great importance that we think about the stewardship of our souls...that we think about the importance of spiritual poverty. In Jesus' sermon on the mount, or the Beatitudes, this stewardship of the soul is the first state of blessedness we, his faithful, are to seek to attain. "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us that to be good stewards of our souls we are to strive to put away vanity and pride and the seeking of the earthly kingdom. Saint John Chrysostom tells us that to rightly offer the stewardship of our souls we are to fear and tremble at God's commandments, holding them above all else and to seek only the Kingdom of Heaven...

in others words, put away those things that 'puff us up'...or those things that cause us to think ourselves better or more worthy than others. This is tough language, especially in our day and time when we are taught at every turn and occasion to seek power and position. "you too can become a millionaire for just 29.95, call us now to find out how. You too can rule the world."

This seeking of the earthly kingdom dominates the Television...it dominates our academic system as well. The Church of Jesus Christ is the only haven that will save us from ourselves.

This morning we remember the Nigerian Ogoni Tribe. Theirs is an example of this stewardship of the soul. The Ogoni tribe's land was raped and robbed of its resources by the government of Nigeria. The Ogoni tribe, after battling with the government over issues of basic human rights, in the midst of terrible abuses by oil companies, lost her leader, Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed by the Nigerian government for treason. During that period more that 750 Ogoni Christians were murdered and more than 8,000 left homeless.

The Nigerian government did its best to crush the souls of the Ogoni. The Ogoni people, however continued on in their Christian cause. Five years after the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa the tribe attempted to reclaim his bones so that he might be properly buried. In an effort to further crush the souls of the Ogoni, the government refused them his bones.

But that did little to crush anything. They carried on with the funeral and recommitted themselves to the cause of human rights...and carrying the banner of Christ continue on. In the midst of threats of death...in the midst of crushing poverty...in the midst of uncertainty, their trust in Christ and the stewardship of their souls continues to carry the day.

So here we sit this morning...the gathered faithful of Saint Paul's by the Lake with the call to the stewardship of our souls resting upon us... So much in our own world is amiss. For some of us national politics and economic uncertainties are our greatest temptation. For others, being so far from our homelands and families causes us to seek solace in places of earthy comfort. For others... it is known only to God what presses so heavily on our souls and what tempts to rob us of our life.

And the place we all look to as a refuge and strength, our own Anglican Church is threatening to tear asunder. In many ways we are like the widow and the Ogoni tribe. We have nothing left but our trust in God.

Look at the Widow again...Hers is not a face of hopelessness. Hers is a face that sees beyond the group gathered in the temple. Her eyes see the promise of God made good in life eternal.

Our trust in God is rewarded. We are rewarded with God's grace that allows courage and hope to reside within us. We are rewarded with a courage that's

strength can carry us much farther than we are capable of walking alone. We are rewarded with the peace of God that passes all understanding. We are rewarded with Life everlasting.

Look around you this morning. You are not alone...you are not left to trust in God by yourself. You...we...all of us have the promise of Christ that where two or three are gathered He will be in their midst. We have each other to help nurture our courage and convictions and faith and we walk together into unknown places and face unknown evils. We have the promise that we the Church will prevail and the gates of Hell shall not triumph over us.

Remember the stewardship of your soul.

Do not fall into temptation.

With all that is going on around us, we are certain to see strangers walking the path alone and wandering through our doors and into our lives. Out of the stewardship of your soul, reach out to them. Greet them in the name of the LORD.

Tell them of the God who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them; who keeps his promise forever;

Tell them of the God who gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food to those who hunger.

Of your charity encourage them and help them realize what an awesome, powerful, life giving thing it is to trust in the LORD.

Make them welcome and let them know they do not have to go through this hour alone. Reach out to them...as you did to Catharine and me, and offer them a parish home.

Tell them of the Ogoni, of their mighty acts in the name of Christ. Tell them of the widow's might. For that my brothers and sisters is what the stewardship of our souls is all about.

The LORD shall reign for ever... your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. Hallelujah!