

## SERMON for Pentecost 25 - November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Readings: 1 Kings 17: 8-16; Psalm 146; Hebrews 9: 23-28; Mark 12: 38-44.

There is a lot to celebrate today ... or should I say 'commemorate'.

Today is "Defence Force" Sunday, a day when we remember and pray for all who are serving in our armed forces - here and around the world in so many roles.

Tomorrow, of course, we remember those who have fallen in previous armed conflicts, as we commemorate "Remembrance" or Armistice Day – the 11<sup>th</sup> of the 11<sup>th</sup>.

Each one reflects something of the commitment and sacrifice which I see in two of our readings this morning.

It could almost be a tale of two widows.

In our first reading the great prophet, Elijah, has an encounter with a widow and her son during a drought which had enveloped the kingdom of Israel, believed to be a punishment of King Ahab for his wickedness.

The widow and her son were about to prepare their final meal with the little they had left. She took a risk, sharing the little she had with Elijah, but because of her trust and generosity towards him, she received such a blessing – a jar of meal and a jug of oil which never ran out!

Our gospel reading is about another poor widow, someone who should have been looked after and cared for by the community and more especially by the religious leaders of her time. The Law of Moses is very clear about the care of the widows and orphans.

While it is very easy just to focus on these poor widows, the temptation is to conveniently slide over the first part of the gospel reading, where Jesus hits out against the arrogance of many of the leaders of his time.

Those who are blessed with the gifts of leadership also have a greater responsibility to look after those who are less able, particularly as the scriptures tell us again and again, "the widows and the orphans" in our midst.

It is all very well living a life in the limelight, but what is it that people see? Someone who has raised their profile to be better than everyone else, who is arrogant and self-serving, or someone who is humble and seeks to serve rather than be served? Someone who is aware of the plight of others, especially those who are struggling the most.

And to highlight this teaching, the writer of Mark gives us the story of the widow's mite. While it is very tempting to use this as a stewardship lesson, the theme "commitment and sacrifice" is again brought to the fore.

It is a story about commitment expressed despite poverty, lack, vulnerability and need in the face of almost certain disdain or disapproval by the power elite. As such it is the triumph of faith and hope over need and experience.

Out of her faith, she is giving her all. Jesus' comment is: "she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on". (12:44)

Jesus seats himself near where the people were making their donations to the Temple treasury. The reason that Jesus was able to see what was being donated, was that those making their donations had to give them to the priest who then put the donation into the relevant horn, depending for what the donation was being given.

Notice that Jesus watches, not in judgment. He merely observes and reports what he observes. He wants us to live a faithful life of dignity and meaning. And he says that the widow shows us one important dimension of such a faithful life. He is calling those who are better off to a life of equal commitment.

There is a story I came across many years ago, which I love. It is about a farmer. One morning he decides he wants bacon and eggs for breakfast. He goes out to the barn and passes on his wishes. The chook has no problem with the request and produces a fine egg for the farmer for his breakfast. When the farmer comes to the pig, the pig strongly objects. The chook is amazed and asks why. The pig says, 'it's alright for you, you only have to make a contribution, but for me it is a lifelong commitment!'

Commitment and sacrifice.

While we are privileged to live in this wonderful but imperfect country where we have freedom to come and go as we please, there is much we take for granted.

One of the greatest dangers is that of complacency and apathy.

Living our lives as Christians can at times be a risky business. Perhaps the physical danger to our wellbeing isn't as great here as if we lived in a strictly Islamic country, and we have that freedom of speech and association. But sometimes, when we are out amongst our friends, or meet new people, we may be a little slow in coming forward that we are active committed Christians - perhaps there is the fear of being vulnerable before another's ridicule, of rejection or may be even worse, being sapped by the complacency which has taken over so much of our society.

What *is* our commitment to our faith? Are we committed to the point of sacrifice? Not necessarily laying down our lives for our faith, for the lives of others; but standing firm for what we do believe.

How often do we risk the "I believe ..." statements?

How often do we trust God enough to give of ourselves with total generosity?

God calls us to give of ourselves, of who we are and what we have, generously to others, and it is how we give which is important.

Do we give grudgingly, clinging on until the last moment?

Do we give expecting to get it back in one form or another?

Or, do we give willingly, the special gift which is us? Give it, share it, generously because we know of all the blessings which God has given us, and we know the miracle of giving - the more you give, the more you have to give - so we can pass on those blessings to others, joyfully?

Giving can make us vulnerable - it can be risky, but if we trust that what we are doing is right, it frees us up to give as generously as the widow in ancient Israel with her last meal, as generously as the poor widow in the Temple, so looked down on by the Jewish elite, as generously as the soldier, the sailor, the airman ... Jesus, who is prepared to lay down his life, so that others may live.

Is what we give a "contribution" or a "lifelong commitment"?

This week, many of us have been looking for a little "hope" for the world. One of the many sayings and prayers which have drifted passed me since Wednesday is:

It will be our love, not our anger, that heals the world.

Despite the times we live in, despite the 'darkness' which seems to surround the world, it is up to us, I believe, to show that faith, hope and love still abound, still matter and are what we need to base our lives upon.

Revd Sally Buckley  
10 November 2024