



Thirty second Sunday Ordinary time 2006

1 Kings 17:10-16 Hebrews 9:24-28 Mark 12: 38-44

Today we will name Widows' Sunday.

The readings from the 1.Kings and from Mark feature widows. Widows were the fore mothers of deaconesses, founders of house churches and the multitude of religious women through the ages. These were women who used their changed circumstances as a way of giving birth to new expressions of ministry.

The first story comes from the collection of tales of Elijah. At that time Elijah predicted that there would be a famine. God told Elijah to make his home in a distant riverbed.

After a time the creek ran dry and Elijah moved to a place in Sidon which is on the northern coast. When Elijah reached the outskirts of the village of Zarephath he met a widow collecting firewood. He recognised this woman as someone whom God had designated to look after him.

He called out to her, 'Can I have a drink of water, please?'

She went off to get him a drink.

He called again, "Please bring me a piece of bread".

The woman stopped in her tracks. Water she could provide but she had not baked bread that day as she was nearly out of flour.

She was embarrassed to have to say that she had no bread, as hospitality to the stranger was of such importance. She had been collecting the sticks to make flat bread for herself and her child, using her last handful of flour and her last drop of oil. After that was used up there would be nothing.

Elijah called on the woman for a supreme act of faith. He asked her for her last supplies so that he could eat. He promised her that in exchange God would keep her flour bin full and her oil jar brimming.

Here is a widow faced with the demands of a stranger, maybe the God he worshipped was also a stranger to her.

She took the risk and was able to feed Elijah, her child and herself

Our second widow is observed in the outskirts of the temple. Jesus is sitting on a bench, watching people making donations to the temple fund.

He sees wealthy people making sizeable donations. Then a widow approaches and drops in two small copper coins. Jesus calls the disciples over to his bench.

“Did you see that poor widow? She has just given more than all the others who have donated to the treasury. They gave from their surplus wealth; she gave from her basic store. That was all she had to live on.

Two widows, how do we judge them?

Imprudent? Irresponsible?

They were women who had already suffered the loss of a spouse. Had that separation taught them to re-examine their attitudes towards possessions?

Remember that the Gospel is about how to be a disciple. The widows then become models of how a disciple should act. To follow Christ as a christened one, is to be willing to be used up in the service of the Gospels.

St. Paul said that we would be judged as foolish. This is in contrast to the lives of those who use religion as an opportunity to gain power and prestige.

What are we asked to give?

Common humanity calls us to care for one another and the planet. Our gifts dictate what we give and how we give it.

In the first story the gift is bread. As disciples we are also called to give spiritual nourishment to those who seek it from us.

In the second story the widow gives her resources. We are called to build the kingdom of God on earth.

Jesus led the way by giving himself totally, his whole life poured out for others.

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