

November 11, 2018 25th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

1 Kings 17:8-16, Psalm 146
Hebrews 9:24-28, Mark 12:38-44

Grace and peace to you, beloved saints,
from the One who was, and who is, and who is to come. Amen.

Did you notice the shift in the middle of our gospel this morning?

It starts off typical as ever...Jesus had been teaching, in fact warning, about the scribes.

Teaching, healing, feeding, blessing, even dying and rising, all those verbs are what we've come to expect from Jesus, that's what he does.

But then, in the middle of today's gospel, he stops teaching, he stops warning them, the paragraph breaks, Jesus sits down, and the verbs change.

Mark says it like this:

"Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury."

He sat down and watched.

Now as a people watcher myself, this catches me.

Jesus sits down and watches.

He watches the crowd, the rich folks bringing their offerings, the large sums they drop in.

And then, with a pause, after all the others had all come forward, Jesus watches as the poor widow approaches and drops in everything that she has.

We don't know many details about this widow, only that she has lost her husband.

We know that she knows a thing or two about grief and loss, about isolation.

We know that probably for a time people had taken care, come 'round with food, with assistance.

Probably for a time they'd done as the law requires and kept her safe, or safe-enough.

But that didn't last, the years spun on, their compassion wore thin, there were others who suffered, others who grieved, others who needed that hot dish, or that hug, and this poor widow was vulnerable.

As Jesus sits and watches, the widow doesn't come forward with the rest of them, but alone, at the end.

While the crowds come *to be seen*, this widow comes *to be known*,

to claim her space, to be in relationship—and Jesus is watching.

She trusts this relationship, for she just gave everything she has: everything, her last two coins...

...And having given it all, now she will need to depend on this community fully, wholly, completely.

Maybe that's what this gospel really is about:

not about making her a hero for giving away her last coins,
but about Jesus holding up her audacity to believe that the community will care for her,
that she needs us.

Jesus is trying to create a community, an intricate web of relationship, where even the poor widow can be known, cherished, centered.

Centered, that's a verb. To center someone, to place not at the edges, the fringes, but in the middle, so a voice can be heard, experience honored, wisdom shared, needs met: Centered.

Today we center Veterans.

It is not only Veterans day, but also the 100th anniversary of Armistice Day.

The Armistice of 1918 ended the slaughter of World War I, we called it The War to End All Wars.

When the Armistice was signed, the world erupted in celebration.

For years bells rang: 11 times at that 11th hour of the 11th day on the 11th month.

Today with communities around the world, we'll ring our bell, we will take time to be silent,

for as much as we seek peace, the devastation of war and those who suffer must be named, centered.

This anniversary is an opportunity for a moral conversation to name the pain that war inflicts,

the scars that veterans who survive battle bring home: broken bodies, but also mental health struggles, trauma, addictions, PTSD, spiritual wounds that go deep.

We are at our best when we center those killed in warfare in every country,

not centering them in blind patriotism,

but centering them in our commitment to work and pray for peace until war truly does end.

We are bold to believe that we need one another in this vital work.

We listen now to the tolling of the bell and keeping of silence. ...

This morning we center Gratitude and Generosity, stewardship.

You are invited to join my family and our congregational leaders in making pledges, commitments for your giving to this ministry for the coming year.

This widow who gives all that she has is a story of ultimate commitment.

I pray that we hear in her story a bold trust in what it means to be Jesus' community.

In a short time, Ann Wagner will share a gratitude and generosity moment.

We want to tell more stories of our community's life and the our response, giving generously of ourselves.

Our society is so individualistic, so addicted to our stuff.

In today's Gospel we are called to a culture of vulnerable conversation about money, about stuff:

What is our relationship to money and how did we learn it?

How do we make decisions about giving to the church and other good causes? How much? To whom?

Why?

How can we align our faith, our values... and our giving, our investing, our spending?

How can we be bold in trusting that we will be cared for by God, in community?

And how can we be bold in creating a community of mutuality that takes care of one another?

I pray that together we can have these vulnerable conversations, for like the widow, we seek to be known.

On Monday morning, the day after All Saints Sunday, long time member, Shirley Peterson, died.

She was 96 years old and died peacefully in her sleep.

Shirley lived most of her life in southeast Minneapolis, and for many years was active in the congregation.

In this space she and Bill married,

and to the font they brought their children for baptism.

Here at Hope next Saturday afternoon we will gather to give thanks for Shirley's life and faith,

to share stories, like their family's big adventures in the Ford Country Squire station wagon,

and to commend beloved Shirley Rose to our merciful God.

When members of this congregation die,

we remember how the waters that first washed over them in baptism, hold them now in death.

We pray at the baptismal font, linking ourselves to God's powerful waters of promise.

Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our sister Shirley Rose. We thank you for giving her to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. At these waters of baptism, you welcomed her into your love. At these waters, you comforted her in times of trouble and encouraged her in delight. At these waters, you now enfold her into Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting. Console us who mourn and bring us together to feast with all the saints of God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.