

Proper 27 2021
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
November 7, 2021
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Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17 Psalm 127 Hebrews 9:24-28 Mark 12:38-44

We have heard this passage from Mark for many years. What is the name of it? “The widow’s mite,” “the poor widow,” “the widow’s offering.” The title is right there in the bible, is it not? ... There is a problem with these titles. The problem is that – there are no titles in Mark’s gospel or in any other passages in the entire bible. Gospel writers did not name the passages; modern editors, translators and printers added titles and other clarifying markings such as paragraphs. We miss a cohesive wholeness of today’s reading when we begin with “Jesus denounces the scribes” and move into “the widow’s offering.” The stories are one! How so?

We have heard for years that the passage about the widow’s mite is one about stewardship: give all that you have – see what the widow did? And what are you giving? ... it is hard to guilt me into making a prayerful offering to God’s church; how about you? Have you given everything yet? Imagine my surprise in seminary to hear a learned scholar say, of all the passages on which to preach about stewardship, do not use this one – it is about financial giving! I still work on understanding the fullness of that advice. I have come to a place of understanding that the widow’s mite story is partially about stewardship if we think of stewardship as giving money. Money is a tiny part of the message here – and is a small part of stewardship, as well.

We notice that we begin the gospel passage with Jesus telling the large crowd in the temple to beware of those who are showy about their lives, basking in other’s respect, seats of honor and showy praying. This advice follows a series of parables about the authorities of the Temple and of Rome: the tenants kill the landowner’s son, there are trick questions about paying taxes and about carrying out Mosaic law to an absurd degree with a woman widowed seven times. Then Jesus tells some disputing scribes that the first commandment is this:

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’

After all of this, Jesus gives the scathing comment that such scribes devour widow’s houses and say long prayers.

In walks a widow; is she one from whom her house – has been devoured? Her possessions taken, her food, money, farm animals – her source of food – all gone, “devoured” by the greed, not need, of others. Into this system – one of taking advantage of the poorest, nameless, powerless people – does the widow put the rest of her life. Here is the commentary: the widow has given her all to a Temple/temple system that will fall. Around her, rich people are giving whatever it is they give; they know that they will have food and shelter tonight and tomorrow. The widow does not know this; in a system that is supposed to be taking care of widows and orphans, she has been failed, and may well die. She has nothing left.

Jesus sees this woman, the widow whom no one else has seen; is she not someone’s neighbor? Perhaps Jesus is telling us today to see her, to love her, and to restore God’s church ... to God’s church. It is not necessarily that the scribes/leadership/we have done nothing, but that in some

cases our “doing” is not enough. A prayer comes to mind for today and the church universal, from the BCP (816):

For the Church

Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior.

And for the mission of the church:

Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

We ask God to correct the church: to fill us with truth and peace, to heal us, to strengthen us, because, God’s beloved children, we are God’s church today. We ask God to “inspire our witness to Jesus” – is that not wonderful? Inspire us in the way that we live and move and have our being, in and through Jesus the Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We pray for the church and participate as the church well beyond this parish. Yesterday, Sr. Warden Bill Heizer, parish Treasurer and delegate Rebekah Webb and delegate Steve Webb attended the 99th Convention of this diocese. We elected people to serve on various diocesan committees and commissions; we accepted the current bishop’s retirement at the end of this year, and we renewed our baptismal vows. The convention began in a parish hall and concluded in worship; all that we do is in the service of the God and God’s church, from administration to volunteering, praying, and worshipping. The Daughters of the King, by the way, supported the entire Convention by praying throughout the day; we were literally grounded in prayer. This is God’s church. We have voice, vote, presence, and many neighbors to notice, love, and respect. With God’s help, we will do so.

Now, together, let us pray for our parish, one part of the church:

For the Parish

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen. (BCP, 817)*