

Lectionary 32 + November 11, 2018

Earlier, in the Psalm, we praised God who gives justice to those who are oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets the prisoners free, watches over strangers, and upholds widows and orphans. It is a consistent theme throughout the Bible. God dwells with those who've been forgotten or cast aside, those to whom the world gives little notice.

Another consistent theme in the scriptures is closely related. God speaks through them. God speaks through those on the margin or those the world deems foolish. God uses outliers as instruments of God's mercy.

In the world of the Bible, one such outlier was the widow – destitute, poor, and low on the social ladder. Yet, God loved them and often spoke through them ...

Like the widow of Zarephath who struggles to make ends meet to provide for her son, yet feeds the prophet Elijah with her last morsels. Yet, with the jar of meal and the jug of oil, God provided enough for days. She listened to the Word of God through the prophet.

Then there is the widow in the Gospel reading who offers her last 2 cents to the temple treasury. Jesus points to her as an example for discipleship. He doesn't single out the scribes who wear religion on their long sleeves or as a badge only to cover their manipulative practices. Nor does Jesus point to the rich who put in loads of money. Instead, he wants his followers to learn from the poor widow, the one on the margins, and the one at the periphery who gives her last two cents. Jesus wants us to imitate her, not because of how much she gives but because she gives the gift of herself and her very life. The poor widow demonstrates trust in God.

Jesus says, "Look at her! This is what I'm talking about!"

I certainly understand why Jesus' disciples didn't quite get what he was talking about. I'm sure it seemed more than a little foolish to hold up as examples those who had no money or status to speak of and certainly to hold up one who would do something as foolish as giving her last pennies away. Still, Jesus says pay attention to them. Pay attention to those

deemed foolish. Do not discount them or write them off. It's not always easy to pay attention to those on the margins. We often have to strain to see them or look for them because they don't get a lot of press.

But, sometimes they do ...

Did you see the article in the *Seattle Times* a couple of weeks ago spotlighting Kory Slatthaugh and Mickey Bambrick? They are the landlords of Lunde Apartments in Greenwood. They made the news because in celebration of their 50 years as landlords they gave all their tenants free rent during the month of November.

More than a generous impulse, this gesture is something they had planned on and made sacrifices for over a long period of time. Their fifty year celebration of serving as landlords comes directly from the practice of the Jubilee Year that we learn about in the Old Testament. During the Jubilee Year, which is every 50 years, sins are pardoned, prisoners are set free, and all debts are forgiven.

Korey and Mickey chose to celebrate this way. Korey told the *Times* reporter that when he dies he's not taking anything with him and he described his relationships with money and all possessions being on loan from God.

Korey is talking about stewardship. As stewards of the earth, we recognize that all belongs to God. None if it we own. None of it is ours. They are gifts from God and we've been entrusted to use them well.

As you can well imagine, Korey and Mickey get frequent offers to sell their property and cash in, but that scenario doesn't line up with their calling. Korey said that his rent-free program this month was scoffed at and realtors were aghast. I suspect many believe that Korey and Mickey are foolish but as he proudly said in the interview: "we're not into numbers; we're into creating a home for people."

Just so, they give presents to their tenants every holiday, are constantly tending to their needs, and they encourage their tenants to give one tenth of their earnings to charity.

Before anyone had a chance to react to Korey and Mickey in person, they took off this month to travel to California where they are helping a friend, a widow, repair her home.

When I read the story in the paper it was a brand new story to me. Well, sort of. Near the end of the article I read about the jeep Korey drives. In fact, they included a picture of it. That part wasn't new because I had seen the jeep before. I've seen it more than once around the neighborhood. Maybe you've seen it, too. The jeep has a very large likeness of a Bible on top of the hood.

The Bible on top of the hood says in big letters: "Can you handle the truth? Got love, joy, peace?"

I'll be honest. The first time I saw the car, I scoffed at the big likeness of the Bible on the hood. I thought it was foolish. I thought it trivialized Christianity and I felt a little proud that at least that for me and church, we would never do such a thing.

When I read the article and saw the picture and learned the story I confess to you, my brothers and sisters, that I realized I had scoffed at some messengers of God. I had to eat some humble pie. The next time I see that jeep, I 'm going to view it with great respect and maybe even wave and if I'm in my car I might even honk to acknowledge some folks who really love Jesus.

Next Sunday is Consecration Sunday. It's the annual stewardship Sunday when we present our 2019 pledges in worship with a celebration brunch after each service. You have been asked to discern growing one step in your giving. Part of your discernment will be praying and listening and hearing the scriptures and, might I add, taking note of the witness of other saints.

Who demonstrates trust in God? Who embodies the generous impulse? Where do you see folks making stewardship a style of life? We live in a culture that idolizes money. We Christians are called to be counter-cultural. God asks us to approach money differently. As an antidote to greed, we give money away. Where do you find examples of these things that the world considers foolish?

Just as the landlords based their rent free month on the biblical practice of Jubilee, I recommend the practice of tithing which is based on the biblical practice of offering our first-fruits to God. I've been tithing for quite a while now – giving 10% of my income to the church and I can honestly say that I do so with great joy and in gratitude. Practices like these help us live more generously. Faith practices shape our lives and our hearts and tithing is one way God gives us to live with intention.

So, discern growing one step. Heck, grow two or three steps if you like. The focus of Consecration Sunday is on the need of the giver to give. To grow in giving because it is a profoundly powerful faith practice.

As you discern, pay attention, and maybe that even means learning from those whom the world deems foolish. See the widow offering her money outside the temple and all kinds of other folks who relish the gift of life as a gift and then realize that the only way to honor such a gift is to give it away.

Sounds foolish? Take heart in St. Paul's words to the Corinthians: "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."