

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – 2024

1 Kings 17:8-16

Hebrews 9:24-28

Mark 12:38-44

Listen to this statement. Run this statement through your wisdom filter. Run this statement through your Christian lived-experience filter and decide whether it's accurate. Faith and trust is happily arriving at the truth that God is in charge. Faith and trust is simply arriving at the truth that a very good and gracious God is in charge. Here's a quote from the prophet Isaiah: "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3). It really is a straightforward assertion: "If God is for us who could be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31). On a scale of 1 to 10 how strongly do you believe that? On a scale of 1 to 10 how well do you *act* on what you believe?

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that we shouldn't be anxious about our lives. Our heavenly Father knows what we need to support this body and life. He clothes the grass of the field with lilies, flowers that have more splendor than Solomon. And our Father's care for us is exponentially higher than how He cares for base creation, so of course He will clothe us. "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (Matthew 6:25). What our Lord tells us to seek is His kingdom (Matthew 6:33). You are here because you are actively seeking His kingdom. You know where it's found. You have discovered the depth of God's grace in His Holy Word. You have discovered the depth of God's grace in the blessed sacraments. You have discovered the depth of God's grace in the life of faith that is lived out in Christ's church where the Lord of the cross serves us with His death and resurrection.

A woman is put before us this morning who has been lifted up as an icon of faith and trust for two millennia. She is worth considering at length and we will do that but let's engage in a little exercise in etymology first. Etymology is the study of the origin of words. I have one word in mind: sincere. You use this word all the time. Back when we used to write letters, people signed them, Sincerely, Thomas Edison; Sincerely, Dolly Madison. Sincere is defined as "free from pretense or deceit; proceeding from genuine feelings." No false pretenses, no hidden agenda, pretty much the opposite of hypocrisy. What's fascinating about this word "sincere" is that it comes from two Latin words, sine (without) and cera (wax). The back-story is that in the way-older-days fine Italian marble would fetch quite a price. The wealthy used it for tabletops or other furniture accents. The marble, though, had to be cut well, cut smooth. Supply and demand; the smooth marble was more desirable. Irregularities in the marble reduced the price. But there were unscrupulous merchants who used wax to fill in the irregularities so that it had the appearance of a smooth finish. The honest merchants caught onto this deception and would advertise their wares as being "sine-cera" (without wax). That is how we got our word sincere.

Jesus warns His disciples about hypocrites. "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widow's houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

They will receive the greater condemnation” (Mark 12:38-40). Pretense; fakery; it is a religious charade to the scribes, the Pharisees. It is not uncommon in any era, including our own. Their marble is irregular, they are sinful men just like any other but they promote themselves as a higher cut than everyone else. Pretense; hypocrisy; don’t they know that God sees the heart? Don’t they know that God *judges* the heart? There is no faith, no trust so they have to play a game, a dress-up game. Those who play this kind of game tend to covet the places of honor, tend to do good works in order to be seen, tend to avoid real service, avoid genuinely selfless service. It’s nothing more than smearing a bunch of wax on a gouged out marble slab and pretending that it’s the highest quality, smooth as Caesar’s Palace. None of us are smooth. “I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5).

Right after Jesus’ lesson about hypocrisy, St. Mark gives us the priceless widow. Poor; she had nothing compared to me, compared to you. Or does she? She gives; all that she has, she gives. And she doesn’t blink. Jesus sees her. Jesus knows her, values her, praises her – all anonymously as far as we know. Everyone can give. No matter what one’s station in life is, everyone can give. It isn’t really an option. If it’s not money then it can be service. St. Paul wrote this: “Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1-2 NIV). A living sacrifice – that’s you. But the widow with two small copper coins is not in the Scripture to teach us about tithing. She’s in the Scripture to teach us about Christ.

The Lord will provide. Do you know the sentiment, the verse? It’s biblical. Abraham and Isaac are walking up a mountain and the young lad says to the old man, and I’m paraphrasing here – hey, old man, we’ve got the knife, we’ve got the fire, we’ve got the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? Abraham, who knew that God had told him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, said this: “God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering my son” (Genesis 22:8). When the time came for something to be sacrificed it wasn’t Isaac but a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. “So Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The Lord will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mountain of the Lord it shall be provided’” (Genesis 22:14). That mountain, the mountain where the ram was sacrificed instead of Isaac, the mountain that Abraham named “The Lord will provide” is Mt. Moriah. Mt. Moriah is where Solomon built the Temple. The Temple is where the blood of the sacrifices flowed. The Temple is where the widow was when she gave her two small copper coins. The Temple, the blood of the sacrifices, the Lord will provide – it all points to Jesus.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the sacrifice which God Himself provided to pay the price for your sin. The widow woman saw all that God had provided at the Temple and she had arrived at the truth that God was in charge. She gave as Christ gave because she knew that God was in charge. Who is the One who gave all that He was and all that He had to His Father *for you*? His blood, His righteousness, His life – He gave it all. The Lord Christ gave to the point that there was no more to give.

The Lord will provide. That is the peace which the widow woman had. That is the trust that the widow woman had. That is the faith that the widow woman had. You are Christ's treasury box, Christ's offering box. Jesus takes the two coins of His body and His blood and He places them in the box of your mouth. Having given all that He possessed as a sacrifice, He now invests His righteousness, His redemption, His resurrection in you. You are the recipient of the Lord Christ's stewardship. He took the lowest place that you might have a seat of honor at the banquet table of heaven. He drained the cup of His Father's wrath against sin that your cup of grace might runneth over. His food was to do His Father's will (John 4:34), and now He feeds you with bread of life. Christ the King sees you, Christ the King serves you, Christ the King is the sincere sacrifice of infinite value and you are clothed in His righteousness. Why play dress-up in hypocrisy? Faith and trust is simply arriving at the truth that God is in charge. The Lord has provided. The Lord is providing. The Lord will provide. Sincerely, Jesus Christ.