

The Rev. Denise Vaughn  
Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost  
1 Kings 17:8-16 & Mark 12:38-44  
November 8, 2009

‘OUR LIVES...AN OFFERING TO GOD’

The story is told of a farmer who woke up one morning and decided he would have ham and eggs for breakfast. He went outside to the barn, found his best-laying hen, rounded up a prime, tender hog, and said: “I’ve got a taste for ham and eggs this morning! How about it? The hen responded immediately by delivering two fine Grade A extra large eggs. But the hog hesitated. The hen turned to the hog and said: “What’s your problem? This farmer feeds us and protects us and gives us everything we need. The least we could do is to give him some ham and eggs for breakfast!” “Hmph! That’s easy for you to say,” said the hog. “All he wants from you is a contribution. From me he wants a real commitment!”

There is a huge difference between the hen’s contribution of an egg and the hog’s commitment of its life. We might be able to understand the hog’s struggle because we struggle in our own lives with what it means to make a contribution or a commitment of our whole lives to God from the blessings given to us. Last Sunday, we processed to the altar our individual understandings of what it means to believe: all we have is of God, and we are called and equipped by God, to give of the blessings God has given us. At GS we experience what it means to make a commitment when we totally give of ourselves, our time and our money, to further God’s kingdom in this community and in the world.

The total giving of ones self is the theme we find today in both the Gospel of Mark and in the Old Testament lesson from 1 Kings. Both are teaching that there is a difference between the giving of a contribution and the making of a commitment of ones whole life to God for the work of Gods kingdom. In these stories, we can find comfort in our affliction when we feel we have very little to offer and they can afflict us in our comfort when we are willing to give everything but ourselves. We are challenged in the hearing of these stories to make a real commitment and we are being invited to participate in the power that can change the world.

The widow of Zarephath had only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug that could be used to feed her and her son. By our standards she was more than poor, she was destitute. Resigned to her fate, she planned to use the flour and oil to prepare a last meal for her and her son, when the prophet Elijah called to her to bring him some water and while she was at it to bring a bit of bread also. She told the man of God of her own need, but did what Elijah asked of her to take the little that she had, to bake a small cake and give it to him first. She could have said, I’m sorry I only have enough to feed my son and I one last meal but from her act of faith “the jar of flour did not give out, nor did the flask of oil fail, as the word of the Lord foretold through Elijah.” She was willing to commit all she had and her generosity inspired Elijah. Despite her desperate situation, the widow was eager to give back to the Lord through what service she could offer.

Then there is the story in our Gospel today often called the widow’s mite. This widow, helpless, weak, with no money, no family, support, understood that everything was God’s to begin with and she acknowledged her commitment to God. When God had her gift, God had her. She made a commitment of all she had and the others contributed out of what they had and such is the difference between a contribution and a commitment.

Such commitments can indeed change the world. For in the end, when all else fails the church will survive, the mission of Christ will be carried out, the kingdom will come into our lives not necessarily through the sharing of our surplus, that helps, but through the passion of our commitment. The widow's two coins represent more than money. They represent faith and belief and how these must be lived out in our lives. They represent a faith-filled offering; an offering found in the giving of all we are, and hope to become, to God for service to the world. Our lives become an offering to God. Much in the same way, that Jesus' commitment to give of himself for us on the cross was an offering to God. When our lives become an offering, we become those two copper coins; living our lives in such a way that our offering is shared with others.

The book "A Wing and a Prayer" written by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Katharine Jefferts Schori is full of her stories and sermons that reflect on our complex world through the lens of scripture and the Church's vocation to serve both its members and those considered 'outsiders' by our church and world. In one of her sermons titled 'Doing is Believing' she says, "The work we do every day, our daily baptismal ministry, is about healing the world—as Paul says, "Letting light shine out of darkness," or in Jeremiah's words, doing that for which "we were consecrated before we were born." Much of the time, our work focuses on the nearby and close hand—our families, fellow citizens, co-workers, and parishioners, but we are part of a much larger whole. After all, when one is in pain, all suffer, and when one is healed, the whole world breathes a bit easier."

And we can certainly understand her words this morning "when one is in pain, all suffer, as we grieve with the families and people of Fort Hood and Orlando, Fl. Our hearts and prayers go out to all who are affected by these horrible, seemingly senseless, tragedies but especially for the loved ones of those killed or injured. There is plenty of room in our world for the ministry of healing. We see tragedy, despair, and hunger all around us. But we can also begin to see that our actions no matter how small can make an enormous difference for good in the rest of the world. Our Presiding Bishop speaks a great deal about the Millennium Development Goals. These are goals of international aid that a number of world leaders have endorsed; in eight broad categories these goals address the needs of the poorest of the poor around our world.

Economists have calculated that if the more advanced nations in the world gave merely 0.7 % of their national income to achieving the goals set forth in the Millennium Development Goals, we would eliminate poverty in the world. The Episcopal Church and many individual Dioceses, including our Diocese of Texas have committed themselves to working toward achieving these goals. Good Shepherd has committed by giving financially to the diocese. Last year we gave..... Katherine believes achieving these goals is an achievable dream and she recommends two books 'What Can One Person Do?' and 'The End of Poverty' by Jeffrey Sachs.

Our commitment can do something for the thousands of people who die everyday from injustice, lack of basic nutrition and medical care. Our commitment right now to the Ekanga family, the people at North Loop apartments, the children at Mainsprings Schools is making a difference one child, one family at a time. Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians says; "We have this treasure in clay jars so that it may be clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." The power, this Holy Spirit power, Paul is talking about, this extraordinary power is a result of our faith and what we believe, and then doing something about our belief. When we know God's love in our lives, we can make a difference. How we use what God had given us, our gifts and our abundance, is a statement of what we believe.

We can commit all we are and all we have as an offering to God, like the widow of Zarephath or the widow in the Temple Courts because our offering is more than just about

money. As the Presiding Bishop Katherine says; “It is about the right use of the gifts we have been given—our intelligence, our hands, our creativity, our passion and our money—how we use those gifts to care for all of creation, including human beings and giant squid and the earth on which we dwell.” So let us be about the healing of the world. In the traditional language of the church, we would be talking about salvation. The roots of the word salvation are the same as for healing, health and wholeness. When the salvation, the healing of the whole world has taken place we will know God’s kingdom has come.

One of the mainline churches in our country has a governing document that declares, “The Church is called to be a sign in and for the world of the new reality which God has made available to people in Jesus Christ.” How does the church do this? Pastor Pete Peery says, by “healing and reconciling and binding up wounds....ministering to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely and the powerless,...engaging in the struggle to free people from sin, fear, oppression, hunger and injustice,...giving itself and its substance to the service of those who suffer,...sharing with Christ in the establishing of his just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world....even at the risk of losing its life.” This is what it means to commit our whole lives...an offering to God.