

Twenty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost 8 November 2015

Mark 12:38-44 the widow's offering
1 Kings 17:8-16 the woman's last flour & oil
Psalm 146 help from God for the vulnerable
Hebrews 9:23-28

[Proper 27B/Ordinary 32B/Pentecost 24 November 8, 2015](#) Textweek

Opening Sentence/Prayer-

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, Amen

The Gospel reading, what a great introduction "A large crowd was listening to Jesus gladly" other translations say "the large crowd was listening to Jesus with delight". Listening with gladness and delight, could they be a core faith starting point for each of us as we seek to discover the presence of the Divine in our daily life? I wonder what delight and gladness we might discover in our readings today.

The widow's offering of two small coins....A traditional interpretation of this reading has been linked to the act of giving, how much one gives and the spirit in which one gives. Today I want to look at that story from a different angle. Historically our Scriptures have used the widow and the orphan as symbols of society's most vulnerable and defenceless people. Our ability to reach out to such people in love, with justice and compassion requires us in our Christian churches to be the visible and practical expression of a living gospel presence in the real world frequented by the widow and the orphan. Jesus is constantly calling us and drawing us into a deeper faith by challenging us, to make the compassion of Christ visible in the world by providing for the needs of those who are suffering, those who are hurting and those who are vulnerable? The essence of this reading is summed up beautifully by Greg Carey and I quote;

Does Jesus seem like the kind of teacher who wants poor people, especially vulnerable widows, to give away their very last resources? Do we seriously imagine Jesus as rejoicing when a widow's generosity deprives her of "her whole livelihood"? I hardly think so.

The widow's generosity places the reality of poverty before our eyes. It reminds us that the poor do not represent parasites who drain society of its resources. This story reminds us that we live in an economy that siphons its resources upward and leaves the vulnerable to face destitution on their own -- and we inhabit churches that ignore the process. Whether our institutions and religious leaders recognize it or not, we have lots to learn from the poor and the vulnerable. If we would just look.

If we would just look....And look we did....you are probably aware that Joan and I have recently returned from an overseas trip that included spending time in Nepal. My time in Nepal was primarily spent observing and learning, it was a time of revelation and discovery, it was a time for personal reflection, that came together as a very simple action, simply just trying my best to be a living loving presence within what we know as the IGWR homes and community in Kathmandu. Kathmandu is reportedly the poorest nation in Asia, so it is no surprise that as you travel round the city with its masses of people and incredibly chaotic dilapidated transport where the rules are, "there are no rules" yet it all works. Rajesh one of the delightful young men being sponsored by IGWR named what it is and why it works – the word Rajesh gave is "RESPECT". There is something within the Nepalese or perhaps it is the primarily Hindu culture that fosters respect for the other person, it appears to be held by all in the knowledge that the other will respect me. I observed that for many Nepalese this simple word translates into actions and relationships. I was blown away by one particular experience in the IGWR girl's house. This accommodation unit comprises, 3 bed rooms with 4 girls per room, all sharing 1 bath room, 1 kitchen and 1 common dining/lounge area as home for the 12 girls and their house mother. On the morning of our first visit to this home we found 3 of the older girls sitting on their bed room floor playing an educational alphabet game with a

severely disabled 5 year old girl called Reecha. Reecha cannot walk, talk or control the movement of her limbs. Reecha was abandoned as a baby and left to die under a traffic bridge, she spent time in care before moving into the IGWR house round 12 months ago. I was profoundly moved by the love and care shown by the older girls towards their much younger disabled flat mate Reecha. To everyone's surprise and wonder this young disabled girl has changed, Reecha now willingly communicates using hand signs in ways that those close to her can understand, clearly demonstrating that despite her outward disabilities, within Reecha is an intelligent young girl desiring love and connection. Can you hear and sense the life giving nature of the home, the place where the girls give of themselves and live and love one another in practical meaningful ways?

I sense modern echoes between Reecha's story and the ancient story of the widow's last meal which was a meal willingly given to Elijah despite the apparent cost to the widow and her son. In the big picture story of Elijah the widow is a bit of a surprising intervention cutting across Elijah's life story for all to see her selfless giving became a surprise and a blessing to others.....I would put my meeting Reecha in Nepal into the totally "surprised and blessed" category. I went there as an observer and learner. I have come away from Nepal as one very surprised by the experience, while at the same time I feel incredibly blessed by the experience of having witnessed the Divine in action.

That was Nepal.....what now for the Divine here in Fremantle? Perhaps our Psalm gives us some clues and pointers. This is a wisdom psalm, it is full of contrasts embedded in its core structure. There are clear contrasts between human plans that inevitably fail because they stand in stark contrast to and in opposition to God's plans for justice for all which is true justice and equity for the vulnerable, the have nots, and the disadvantaged across our community. The Divine calls all of us both here in Fremantle and there in Nepal:

To give food to the hungry; to set the captives free

To give sight to the blind: to lift up those who are bowed down

To love righteousness; to care for the stranger in our land

To uphold the widow and the orphan,

In essence we as the children of God are called to be the living expression of the Divine presence where ever we may be. So I can confidently pray, "We praise the Divine, who lifts up our hearts – towards a world community full of compassionate Justice for all."

Michael Jessup