

Watching Out and Watching For

1 Kings 17:8-16 / Mark 12:38-44

Scripture Reading:

Good morning. Our reading today is from First Kings, chapter 17, verses eight to 16, when the Lord said to Elijah, Go and live in the village of Zarapath, near the city of Saidon, I have instructed a widow there to feed you. So, he went to Xrapeth, and as he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks and he asked her, would you please bring me a little water in a cup? And as she was going to get it, he called to her, bring me a bite of bread, too.

But she said, I swear by the Lord your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house, and I only have a handful of flour left and a jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to Cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die. But Elijah said to her, don't be afraid. Go ahead and do just what you've said. But make a little bread for me first, then use what's left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son, for this is what the Lord the God of Israel, says.

There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops will grow again. So, she did as Elijah said. And she and Elijah and her family continue to eat for many days. There is always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah, the word of the Lord. Thank you. I love that story. If you could join me now and please stand for the reading of the gospel.

This is from Mark, chapter twelve, verses 38 to 44. Jesus also taught beware of the teachers of religious law, for they like to parade around and flowing robes and receive respectful Greetings as they walk in the marketplaces and how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head of table at banquets. Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be more severely punished. Jesus sat down near the collection box in the temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money.

Many rich people put in large amounts. And then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins. Jesus called his disciples to him and he said, I tell you the truth. This poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions, for they gave a tiny part of their surplus. But she poorest, she is, has given everything she had to live on the word of the Lord.

Pastor

All right. We are going to send you kids off to kids alive now and then we're coming back for our baptism. So, it's going to be a little shorter in Kids Alive today. But we are so thankful that you are here today. Let's have a prayer for the kids. Father, we love these children, and we know

that you love them even more. We ask, Father that you would pour out that love upon them through your Word, taught to them through their teachers, through their parents, through this Church, and let them grow strong in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, your Son in His name we pray. Amen.

God bless you all as you go to Kids Alive with Ms. Natalie and Ms. Elaine. Very appropriate to run in Church any time. Run to hear God's word. We love it. Let's prepare our hearts now, father, we are your children, too. We want to run to you, Lord. So much gets in the way. But you run to us. You bring the word to us. You make it clear to us. And when it's not clear, your Holy Spirit comes alongside and teaches and guides and leads us into all truth and understanding.

So we invite you, Holy Spirit, to do that. We ask you to take my words and cause them to be a servant to your word and that your word would accomplish its purposes in us, making us more and more like Jesus your Son, his name. We pray. Amen. It's been a crazy morning. I was supposed to have all this baptism stuff set up on Friday, but got worried that I couldn't get it until this morning. And by God's Grace, God sent me somebody who I worked with many years ago in Pittsburgh in youth Ministry. He's now the chaplain to the Pittsburgh Panthers. And they came down and they beat Duke and football this weekend. And he came over and had dinner with us and spent the night. Mark Steffie there you all can greet Mark. Mark works with Coalition for Christian Outreach CCO in Pittsburgh, and he has a special Ministry to athletes. And it's just been a joy over the years to watch how the Lords used him in the lives of many, many young people, bringing them to Christ and showing them that there's more to life than football and more to life than sports.

But anyway, Mark came with me. We picked this trough up from Summit Church today. Their normal baptism thing has a hole in it. And I was like, I'd never be able to pick that up on my own. So Mark was here and then we had a time filling this. We used funnels and hoses and pumps, and eventually it happened. But it didn't happen like I had envisioned it. I'm just grateful that we are here with warm water in the horse's trough for the baptism today.

But that has nothing to do with what I want to share. Now, you know what happened to me this week, as I was preparing this message, a message where Jesus sees a widow putting in two small coins into the temple treasury, literally a negligible amount, something that nobody would ever get excited about. As they were counting up the money from the treasury, he said she's put in everything. Thank you. She's put in everything. All she had to live on.

Jesus is impressed by her heart. He's impressed by her generosity. He's impressed by her faith. She doesn't know where her next meal will come. And yet she's put in everything all she had to live on. And I'm impressed. Are you impressed? You can't help but you read that account and you're like, she is the hero of the story. You can't help but feel like I want to be in some measure like that. So guess what happens is I'm preparing this message. I'm on my porch. I've got my laptop on my lap.

I'm typing in stuff. I've got my commentary. I'm reading the Bible. I'm praying Lord, give me the message. And the phone rings, and I look down. And it's a number I don't recognize which what I normally do with numbers I don't recognize is I don't answer, right? You're the same, right? I just don't answer. But I've made a number of calls that day and the day before to various businesses, things to do with the Church, things to do with our search for a house and thought it might be related to one of those things.

I pick it up and almost immediately as I pick it up and hear the voice on the other end, I'm like, they got me. It's the firefighters of North Carolina. And somehow every year they get me, I don't know how they get there. They must just keep calling. And they got me. And I gave, like, a \$10 donation last year, and they're like, would you be willing to give a \$10 donation again? And we'll send you everything? And I'm like, yeah, sure. But my reaction was nothing like the widow.

There was that inward. And I wonder how many times our reaction is like that when we walk into a situation where we know that we're called to give in some way, whether it's a Church and maybe during a stewardship campaign or a fundraiser that somebody's invited you to and you're I got to say yes, but I didn't want to go or it's a beggar on the street and you sense that there's real need there or you're in the checkout line at the grocery store. I don't know how many of you get annoyed by this, but I get annoyed by it: "Do you want to round up today? Would you like to give to such and such today today?" And you're annoyed because maybe you just gave yesterday in the same grocery store. But you feel like you're going to be a miser if you say no. But how often our heart is unlike that widow who's looking for the opportunity to give it was giving beyond anything we could imagine giving certainly what I could imagine giving. And so I think the Lord was taking me to school as I was preparing.

But I want you to notice something Jesus doesn't do. At the end of the object lesson. He doesn't say. So here's what you need to do. Here's what you need to give. If you're given this amount, you need to give this amount. If you're giving that amount, you need to give this amount. Jesus doesn't do that. He doesn't go there. Why? Because he's after something more. He's always after something more. He's after our hearts. And so he calls his disciples. The scripture literally says that it says that calling his disciples to him.

That's in verse 43 of Mark chapter twelve, calling his disciples to him. That's what Jesus is doing today. It's what Jesus is always doing. When churches come together, Jesus is calling his disciples to him for a purpose. And it's not to exact something from them. It's to build something in them. It's to call something out of them. It's to invite them into something. And so Jesus doesn't give numbers here. Instead, he begins to train his disciples. He sees this as a molten moment to train them, to see as God sees. What I want to do is look at this passage and listen to a couple of things that Jesus says for in this passage leading into this encounter with a widow, he says, Watch out. What we're going to find out is that Jesus is really concerned with what we see, what we take in and how we take it in. And so he's saying, there's something I want you to watch out for. But there's also something I want you to watch for.

Something I want you to watch out for is something I want you to watch for, because this is the way of discipleship. Watch out for. This is what he says. As he taught Mark 12:38, as Jesus taught, he said, Watch out for the teachers of the law.

Here's the problem. Just as much as we know that the widow is the hero in the story, we know that now the teachers of the law are the villains of the story. If we know the Gospels at all, we know that they're among the crowds that kill Jesus. They're part of the religious elite and the religious leaders. So we immediately see them as the villains. But you don't have to tell people to watch out for a villain, right? When you're watching kind of a very obvious movie, you know the villain. The minute you see him, he's kind of smarmy. His hair might be slicked back. He's got this look about him, or she right.

And you just know this is the villain of the story. We just watched Parent Trap a few nights ago, and there she was, this young woman who's trying to worm her way into this guy's life. And anyway, I'm digressing. But, you know, she's the villain. She's got these arched eyebrows; she looks all put together and altogether too slick.

That's the way we think. That's the way we think of these teachers of the law. That's not how people thought of them in those days. Just watch out for the teachers of the law because they were the experts. I mean, they knew the scriptures inside and out.

They taught in such a way that Jesus could even affirm much of their teaching. They were very theologically exact, and they were very well respected in the communities. Watch out. Jesus says he's teachers of the law for these PhDs, for these theologians, for these Bible preachers, watch out because they like to walk around in flowing robes. And again, people probably looked at them and thought, wow, they really look impressive.

Everything is just perfectly dry cleaned, it's perfectly in place. And there was no doubt that people looked at them, and many people envied and wanted to be like them. Watch out for those who look put together. Jesus says, he needs to speak that to our hearts. Right.

One day I was looking pretty, particularly put together, which isn't too usual for me. And I had on these new pants. I had this sweater. I had a button-down shirt and just the way everything kind of matched. I met up with a friend for lunch, and he goes, wow, Patrick, you would fit in inside the belt line. You'd fit in great. And he was meaning it as a compliment, big time. And I took it that way. I felt the endorphins. I felt that kind of like the rush that people have when they look at their social media. And they normally get 40 likes for a post, and they've got 90 likes. I felt that, yeah.

Watch out, Jesus says. For those who look put together who actually love looking put together, they like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogue and the places of honor at the banquet. They are into social status. They are into their position, and they're also very good at masking. That right.

Watch out for that. There's an inward motivation of the heart that moves many, many people to spend many, many hours seeking degrees and Acknowledgements and accomplishments. And not that those things in and of themselves are bad. I want somebody who spent many hours to be working on me. If they're a doctor, I want somebody who spent many hours to be expositing the Scriptures to me if they're a theologian.

But he says, watch out if the inward motivation of their heart, which you can't see, is that they love that stuff, the social status and position that it brings and that they are actually actively working to maneuver themselves in those ways because something even more sinister may be going on now, of course, they look great. Satan masquerades as an angel of light. The Scriptures tell us so. One of the things, as we baptize kids and as we raise them up in the Church is somehow trying to train them to have an eye to watch out for the devil in his works, and that he doesn't come to us with red horns and a tail in a way that we can easily recognize. His hair is not slick back. He's not smart. He looks like the best and the brightest among us. He's accomplished. He's wealthy and we're attracted. We're drawn to him. Watch out for the promoters of the good life. Jesus said, because something more sinister may be going on. He says they devour widow's houses.

What translation was that? Lauren, I loved it. You can tell me later, but I love the way it was. They were taking advantage of their position to rob widows. We don't know exactly what they were doing, how they're devouring these widows houses. But to cover it all up, they make a show with lengthy prayers under the veneer of religion is really a heart of greed. Watch out for that.

But Jesus doesn't end there. He now knows. I want to give something positive to my disciples. So the Scriptures tell us that Jesus sat down verse 41 opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched. Catch it. He watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Jesus sat down. There's something there for the disciple as well. That part of coming here on Sunday is the chance to sit down at the feet of the Lord. But part of what he wants us to take out of here is that we learn to sit down where we are in this world and watch. Watch for what's going on in the world. Watch what's going on in people's lives.

Watch what's impressive and think through. Why is it impressing me all of those things Jesus is doing? God is a watcher. And Jesus is watching to see what's going on here in this culture. And he watched many people throw in large amounts. And that's what we get excited about, right? When the Treasurer is counting up money, the Treasurer sees some of the biggest donations and they get excited. Right? We're going to make budget this year. We're going to exceed budget. I get excited about that, don't we? All right, whether it's for the Church budget or a family budget or the business budget, Jesus is noticing that. And so he watches them putting it in and the treasure gets excited. The youth Minister is thinking, now we can afford the sound system that we wanted for our youth room.

And Jesus, I want you to watch for something more. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth. But she out of her poverty, put in everything. All she had to live on. The word he uses there for all she had to live on is the word buy on which is the word for life, her living.

Somehow. Jesus, in his prophetic intuition, knows that that's what's going on with this woman, that she is stepping out in faith like, Lord, this is all I have. It might buy me a few bites to eat tonight. But I so love you, Lord, that I want to give to your temple. I want this to be put to use for the worship of the people of Israel. I want it to be put to use for the alms that are given to the poor. And here she is, poor. It's like Paul when he's writing to I forget the Church he's writing to. I think it's the Corinthians. And he talks about another Church that begged even though they were poor to give out of their poverty. It was the Macedonians, and he said they gave above their means. Paul was impressed with the very same thing. He saw that a person can be poor physically and be wealthy in generosity in the way that they give and the desire to bless the Lord. She gave all her buy on her life. And Jesus says, that's what I want you to watch for. I want you to get into the habit of looking at the least and the lowest and the lowly and watch what God does with their hearts. Watch how they respond to God in worship, because so often their lives are unimpeded by all these other things that we all go running after and that we want the person I want to be like in my head is often the widow. But in my heart, it's really the wealthy people who are able to give out of their abundance.

I want to have an abundance, right? I look at my own bank account and I go, Man, wouldn't it be nice to have X amount? And yeah, I could be able to give more, but I'd also be able to do this and fix this up and all those things. Our hearts just go. There no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Jesus knows that's where our hearts go. But here is why Jesus doesn't end this encounter by telling his disciples. Now, here's how much I want you to give. He wants us to wrestle with this. The life of discipleship is a life of following. It's a trajectory that we get when we baptize somebody. That's the event, right. But a life of baptism is getting up, raising up to the life of Christ and following.

And so, it's following Christ on this trajectory. And he says, on this trajectory, I want you to watch out for all that the world is going to tell you brings life. Watch out for the many, many teachers that are out there and the experts because so many of them are corrupt to the core. And what they ultimately promise you is not life. But what I want you to watch for is the hand of God in the very small places and amongst the poor and the lowly.

And when you see God there, follow that what's the answer. The crudest application, right would be for me to say, Well, Mark is in full time Ministry, and he has to raise his salary. So, I want all of you to become supporters of Mark. Before we leave today, we're going to have a sign-up sheet. I'm not doing that. That's the crudest of all applications, right? I thought you were getting up to give him. The crudest of all applications would be for me to say, all right, get

out your checkbook. Now, how much did you give this year? Percentage wise. I want you to raise it by X percent. It's the crudest of all applications.

Jesus doesn't do that Steady's, calling us to a life that looks a life that watches. And what do we ultimately watch? We watch Jesus. Jesus is the widow. The reason Jesus was so taken by the widow. The reason the story of the widow of Zerapheth is in one Kings. She gave all she had to live on. Did you catch it? It's almost a humorous encounter. Elijah is told that he's going to be fed by this widow. He goes to this widow; can you give me something to drink? And she's like, sure. And as she's going, can you also bring me some bread? And she's like, I've got this much flour left.

And he says, Well, go ahead. I'm a Prophet. Go ahead and make a cake for me of bread. And God's going to take care of you. And the widow does it. She's just like this other widow. Jesus God the Father. They're impressed with that because that's their heart. Jesus came in. He didn't give just a little. He gave it all his blood poured out. And that's what we watch every Sunday. When we come together to worship, we watch Jesus being poured out for us in his body and blood. We know that this is the God who gave his life for us and has continued to give his life for us. Even now, intercedes at the right hand of the Father, for us, pouring out for his children, who are on the life of Baptism, who are being raised to life to follow.

And when that begins to get into our hearts, when we become more aware of His presence, when we experience the glory of His goodness, that's when it begins to pour out that's when our timid hearts become gradually more and more generous, gradually more and more like Jesus following him in this adventure, he's called us to live, giving our very lives away and finding out that this is life. To lay our lives down. This is life. Amen Father, as these children are baptized today, may we be reminded of our own baptismal fouls as these children go all in, may we be called deeper in as these children are raised up today from the waters may our hearts be lifted up that we would follow you, Jesus? More nearly. We would love you more, dearly. We would see you. We would watch you more clearly. It's in your name.

We pray. Amen. Amen.