

VETERANS AND OTHER PEOPLE OF WORTH

Pentecost 25-B

November 11, 2018

Mark 12:38-44

Today is Veterans Day, and it did not go unnoticed to me on this 100th celebration of the armistice signed between the Allies of World War I and Germany: a cease-fire that began at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918. The formal peace Treaty of Versailles would be signed the following year, as would other separate treaties that finally marked the end of the “Great War.”

Following World War II and the Korean War, the holiday was re-named Veterans Day, to include all who served in the armed forces.

If there is a kind of loose connection between our national holiday and today’s readings, it came to me in the words about the poor widow in today’s gospel reading: “She gave everything that she had....” While we observe Memorial Day to remember those veterans who died while serving their country, this Veterans Day reminds us that all those who serve put *everything they have* on the line.

This morning’s account of Jesus, accompanied by his disciples, watching people give to the temple’s treasury has frequently been used to encourage people to give sacrificially, and to trust God’s provision.

At the same time, we think about those of greater means who can more easily make the choice to give large gifts; and we’re struck by the contrast between the rich and the poor, those who have and those who do not. We think of systems that seem to keep the rich richer and the poor poorer.

We wonder: Are the wealthy scribes and the poor widow object lessons that Jesus and the evangelist use to instruct us, or is there perhaps more to the story?

Society (and even church, at times) has a tendency to look on those who are wealthy as particularly blessed. Such teaching we (the pretty-well off but not “rich”) refer to as a “prosperity gospel” that essentially teaches that the more faithful we are, the more we will be financially rewarded.

But even if we don’t actually buy into a theology of financial prosperity, we still hold the wealthy in awe. And when we do a quick self-assessment, we are thankful (and perhaps comforted) that we are not homeless, destitute, or as bad off as some other people are. Years ago we watched “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous” with some degree of envy. And, who among us doesn’t like to get a little taste of “the good life”—which is at least a little, if not well beyond, our reach?

Lest you feel too guilty of covetousness, it is OK to have goals, and it’s good to want our lives to be better and our bank accounts to be a bit fatter. As long as we don’t have to compromise our principles or make *a deal with the devil*, there’s no harm done. Until...we put too much faith in our own accomplishments and too little trust in the God who gives us the gifts that allow us to earn a living and do great things. Or worse, until we look past “the least of these” because just making eye contact brings discomfort and reminds us of what we don’t want to become: poor widows, homeless, hungry, unemployed, destitute.

A colleague remarked that the temple leaders shouldn't have even accepted the meager offering, the last few coins of that poor widow. She truly needed what little she had to live on. But she gave, trusting that God would guide her through another day, and provide her with those things she *truly* needed.

The bottom line isn't about the religious leaders or the rich or the disciples or the poor widow, or even really about Jesus, except in one way: Jesus noticed her. By realizing (and helping us to realize) that she gave everything she had, he lifted her up not as an object lesson, but as a person, a child of God, someone of worth.

When Pastor Lose wrote the Prayer for Veterans Day that we read together at the beginning of our worship, he commented:

“...there are occasions where our culture invites us to pray, and praying to our Lord and God is never a bad thing. Moreover, when we realize that veterans struggle with depression and thoughts of suicide at disproportionate rates compared to the rest of the population, it is a chance, I think, not only to recognize those who have served, but to remind them and all of us that God sees them and cares for them.”

[“A Prayer for Our Veterans and for Peace,” at www.davidlose.net]

Today, we remember especially our veterans, because God does indeed see them; God indeed cares for them. Taking a cue from our gospel (and the first reading) that show us poor widows who risk what little they have because they put their trust in God or in God's servant, we are reminded of the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the brokenhearted, and all who are less fortunate. We are reminded that this world is big and diverse. It is filled with people who are like us, as well as many who are different. Whether they have a different skin color, a different religion, a different nationality, or a different social standing, they matter. And God notices and cares, loves and cherishes each one.

So can we. God has given us the ability and the opportunity to notice, to love, to assist, to plead on their behalf, to fight for their freedom, and to bring justice and peace. Amen.