

Proper 27 Year B

For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.

Six or so years ago, during the Bayou bash, an old extremely disoriented woman wandered into our parking lot across Ann Street. Some of y'all may remember. She was unkempt, her mien of gray hair matted; her clothes were tattered; she smelled the way the extreme poor smell; there was a look of desperate panic in her eyes; she couldn't remember where she lived; she couldn't even remember her own name. I became a little panicked because I couldn't see a way to help her....she just kept saying, as if to muster a faint trace of hope, "I believe in Jesus!" I called the police, who I felt might know how to better deal with such matters, but before they arrived, a neighbor who apparently had seen her front door wide open, and knew of her plight, tracked her down, recognized her and took her home, back through the chill and dark of the night from whence she came. I can still see her....her wanting dark eyes....the despair in them....I haven't seen her since. She may be dead now. "I believe in Jesus," she said... How could she, I thought? How could a loving God allow such a wretched estate? Why would she presume that God is a God of Love? Back across the street we feasted and reveled up and against the dark of this late October night.

Throughout Hebrew scripture we are reminded that God has a passion for the widow and orphan, the alien, the outcast....God, of course, loves all of us as well...but God's peculiar passion is for the poor and the dispossessed, the widow and orphan, the most vulnerable of the social structure... time and again God reminds the people of Israel that their first and foremost duty is to care for and dignify the marginalized of our world, the ones lost on the periphery....we are not complete without them....God is not complete without them....God continues to pursue their salvation from the dark of our world.

And here, today, amid the terse narrative of Mark's Gospel we see the widow again, front and center, a phantom from the annals of Hebrew scripture, the sacred lore of the people Israel....the widow again... As the child is claimed from the periphery, as the blind beggar steps from the margins of existence to center stage, so too does the poor widow....she comes from the shabby, and unkempt streets, and steps into the Temple, the very center of the universe for the Jews....this has now become a pattern in Mark....reaching for the margins to claim the lost...and there is Jesus watching this drama....and he can't keep silent. We have just heard Jesus

rail about the hypocrisy and greediness of the Pharisees and scribes....the well to do, the elite, who when they give, they give from their surplus... these Pharisees and scribes who don't see his vision of the way God would have us live....the widow, like the blind beggar, whom we heard from two Sundays ago, does see....she sees what is required....what it takes to live together...It takes all that we have...all that we are ...a life lived utterly for the greater good... she sees that all that we have to live on belongs to God... Makes for a great stewardship sermon doesn't it? The poor quaint widow, the model of the generous giver, the patron saint of stewardship, she....The preacher might say: Dear people of God, it is not ten percent of what we have that we give, though we'd be in fine shape if we did... We give all that we have. God wants our all....but there is more here in this passage that we can't ignore. There is another side, another edge to this sword.

Jesus is not just saying that we give far deeper than our surplus; that we give from our flesh to the bone, all that we are; but he is also offering a compassionate lament....a lament. He has just finished warning us of the Pharisees and scribes, the elite who are cozy with the status quo, cozy with the powers that be, who, as he says, devours the house of the widow....who in their own greed devour that held in trust for the least, the orphan, the widow, the lost and the least....He points to her...see! This is what I'm talking about....see this widow...How could we dare ask all of what she has for the Temple treasury, which is nothing, and not be convicted of our own responsibility?....and that responsibility is forever spoken of in scripture... feed my poor....take care of the widow....attend to my least....and it takes an abused widow, the least of the least, just like the blind beggar...it takes an abused widow's faint, and perhaps naïve hope....to convict us that she, and all the least in our world, are our responsibility.

The wealth of the world is now greater than at any other time in history... exponentially greater....and the poverty, the poverty of the world is as well.... "I believe in Jesus"....the poor Ann Street widow says from a disoriented mind caught in the snares of disease and poverty....yet a mind that clings to hope....a spirit that cries out for help... cries out for the truth in a world wealthy and a world poor.... A world of the dignified and a world of squalor and indignity...why the gap?

Friends of God... as the raised and living body of the Christ...let us give the widow a reason to believe....let us be convicted by her desperate hope....a hope crowded and belied by the weight of the world...let us in our living the faith...giving all that we are for the good...let us as people of the way....the renewed incarnation, the very commonweal of God in its becoming...the coming way God means for life on earth to be....let us say

no to the gap... no to the abyss...the disparity between wealth and poverty...between shame and dignity....let us be the bridge, the bridge of the Baptized, which is the very Gospel itself coming alive and bringing life....let us give the widow a reason to believe.....and us.... all of us... a reason to believe as well.

Katharine Jefforts-Schori, just after she was installed as Presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church set as a priority, the millennium goals of the United Nations..... that hunger and disease, and squalor and want be eliminated in our day....that the massive wealth of the world engage the abject poverty of the world....and that there become a graceful new order... the kingdom of God in short....coming as we speak....there are signs of its coming....the miraculous hope of the widow, one who has no rational reason to hope, the hope of the widow: One such sign...Remember that salvation is not about just me and Jesus.....but about the community of the faithful bearing the way of Christ, the way of mercy, hope, compassion, justice and generosity to the world's want. Salvation is about engaging and claiming those on the world's periphery. Let us be convicted by the widow...she of low account...she with absolutely nothing but a faint, yet luminous hope.... Let us live the way of the Christ, the way of giving all that we are.... The way wherein all can say, poor and rich, the loved and the lost, the shamed and the honored.....wherein all can say....“We believe in Jesus” and mean it.