

Sermon and Scriptures for Sunday, November 8, 2015

by Diana Pelletier, Faith Formation Facilitator

Old Testament Lesson: 1 Kings 17:8-16

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Gospel Lesson: Mark 12: 38-44

As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 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."

This is the Word of the Lord... **THANKS BE TO GOD.**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight oh Lord you are our rock and our Redeemer. **Amen.**

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In June of 2011, I was depressed by the impending anniversary of the car accident that left me in the wheelchair; realizing I needed to do something to regain my positive attitude and outlook on life, I gave in to Jeff's suggestion to take me on a motorcycle ride. Let me set the scene for you a little bit... It had been four years since I'd broken my neck in a car accident, I was able to walk only very short distances using a walker and only with supervision, Cole had just turned four years old three weeks before, it was a beautiful day and I was lamenting my disabilities with a desire to be *'normal'*.

My friend Sandy and I were visiting Jeff where he was living at Vanderkamp. Hearing of my desire to be 'normal' Jeff suggested that we go for a ride on his motorcycle. While I was excited by the idea I was also terrified. In order to make it happen I would have to allow Jeff to practically pick me up and put me on the back of his bike. I would have to trust that Jeff would not let anything happen to me. I would have to trust in my body that I would have the strength and balance to hold on and keep myself safe. In other words, I would have to step way out side of my comfort zone to allow myself to take a ride.

I took a deep breath, put on the helmet which felt really heavy and we did go... I lasted about a mile when I told Jeff I needed a rest. After a short rest I asked if we could go back to my chair, my box, if you will.

So, this first motorcycle ride was not exactly the grand adventure I had envisioned when I agreed to jump outside of my comfort zone and take a risk, but it did open up something inside of me that made me realize how beautiful it was to focus on living rather than on the fact that I almost died four years before. This two-mile motorcycle ride started

what I now refer to as, "Reclaiming the Day," which is when every year on or around the anniversary of our car accident I choose to step outside my box, my comfort zone, and do something life affirming. I have since been in a hot air balloon, I have flown a private airplane, I rode a horse and this year I went to Disney World!

In this regard I feel as though I have learned to step outside of my box and engage the world in a new way.

So, how about you? Have you ever taken a risk? Have you chosen to do something where the end result could have left you changed, for the better or worse?

This morning when you arrived in this space I had a note on the first two slides in our PowerPoint that said, "\*PLEASE SIT CLOSE TO THE FRONT\*". As I look out I notice that some of you *are* sitting closer than you normally do, maybe not by much, but closer nonetheless.

By inviting you to sit closer to the front of the sanctuary than you normally might I was hoping to give you a small opportunity to recognize that our routines and habits can be boxes we put ourselves in. Sometimes we may not even realize that we have done it. We get comfortable doing things a certain way and even changing where we sit might make some of us uncomfortable. Please know that you are not being judged if you did not choose to change seats. Comfort zones come in all shapes and sizes. What might be easy for some could feel like risk-taking for others. Even an acknowledgment of how you felt about the *idea* of changing seats could be a risk for some.

I have done a lot of talking about boxes so far this morning. I guess I better explain that I believe there are two ways to look at boxes:

1. We can look at boxes as a place of safety, a place we put ourselves in for comfort as we saw with Cole during the children's message.
2. We can look at boxes as something other people put us in and use to define us.

When we turn to this morning's Scripture passages we hear two stories of women stepping outside of their boxes and taking huge risks. These women, both described as widows, would have been existing on the bottom rung of the social ladder in their culture. Most of those who lived around them would have put them in a box labeled 'widow,' which would mean that they were seen as powerless, poor and uneducated. Like the rest of us these women also probably put themselves in self-made boxes, choosing to stay on the fringes of society so as to not come out of their comfort zones.

Despite the boxes society put them in and the comfort zones they had become accustomed to, these women took extreme risks in the name of their faith. The first, the widow of Zaraphath, used the very last meal and oil that she had to bake a cake for Elijah. "Why?" we might ask would she risk going hungry and dying in order to offer food to Elijah. Well you see she had *nothing left to lose*. She had already told Elijah her plan was to make this last meal for herself and her son and that they would then go away together and die. So when Elijah told her, "Do not be afraid" and that the Lord would take care of her she had faith and she believed him.

The second widow we encounter in the temple treasury being watched by Jesus himself. Again, this woman would be considered the lowest of the low in society, having very little value to anyone else. It is clear that she is very poor

for Jesus tells us that by putting into the treasury two copper coins she has put in all that she has, in other words she has ***gone all in, and she gave her all.***

She must have known that with no money left to her name she could not hope for much out of life. How would she eat? Where would she lay her head? Despite her vulnerability she was willing to give her all to God and to risk everything for the sake of the greater good. She put herself at risk for the opportunity to share in God's dream for the world.

It might seem obvious why these Scriptures are associated with what we might call stewardship Sunday, or the day in which we gather our financial pledges for the ministry of the church. But I believe it would be easy to oversimplify that connection. I do not believe God is telling us that we must give up all of our money and belongings in order to be faithful followers (though it does take money to run the church). I do believe, however, that God is asking each one of us to *go all in* for our faith. God asks us to take risks for the sake of the Gospel; to be instruments of God's peace and love in the world even when we do not feel comfortable doing so.

We can see an example of this right here in Fairmount community church. Church itself can be one of our boxes, a safety zone. It is safe to profess God's love for us and our faith in God while inside these walls where we know others believe how we do. It is riskier... scarier... to share our faith with people outside of church. We do not want our faith to be judged or misunderstood. We do not want to be judged because we believe in God and Jesus. We do not want to be put in a ***Christian*** box that others might not understand.

In order to be a part of God's kingdom here on earth we need to ***BE*** God's kingdom. As children of God we are not

just asked to be God's presence in the world... we are **called** to be. We are not just asked to pledge an offering to our church's ministry but we are called to be ministers, to be disciples.

Perhaps these widow's stories give us an opportunity to experience what it is like to give our all for God. From their risk-taking experiences we learn that God provides all we need. Through their faith they show us that when we go all in for God, God takes care of us.

Not every risk taken needs to be huge, but every risk taken will change you and your perspective and help you feel freer to take more risks. My life-changing 'Reclaiming the Day' tradition started with a 2 mile motorcycle ride. Perhaps for you it starts with changing your perspective by sitting in a different pew.

God meets us on the edge of our boxes in our places of vulnerability and discomfort and God tells us, "Do not be afraid, for I will take care of you."

So what does your box look like? (PowerPoint pictures of boxes)

1. Is your box beautiful?
2. Is it locked?
3. Is it simple?
4. Is it rustic?
5. Is it old?

Are you willing to get out of your box, to take a risk, to answer God's call by saying, "Here I am, Lord!" We stepped out of your box and take a risk for the God who risked it all for you?

Amen.

