

Getting Connected by Discovering Your Assignment
October 21, 2007 (COJ and LIGHT with slides)
St. John's Lutheran Church
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What a question Jesus asks: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” Here in this place, at St. John’s this day, I think Jesus would see a lot of it. He’d see parents saying Yes. Children saying Yes. Families saying Yes: to baptism, to life in community, prayer, and service. When I think about faith, I think about saying YES--in word and deed--to God’s promises of grace and redemption. I think of faith as saying yes to God’s presence and peace in our lives and using that presence and peace to transform life as we know it.

Our Gospel story for today is all about a woman who is saying Yes to God’s promises. To Jesus, she is a model of faith. She is persistent in prayer, steadfast in her mission, and she will not be silent. It should be no surprise that Jesus exalts a widow. I mean, isn’t that just his way, once again, to challenge his followers to look to unexpected people as models of faith. Widows were too often in peril. They had few, if no, legal rights or recourse. Without family, they had zero protection. As women, they were

simply marginalized. But those who knew the Scriptures and the law knew that they mattered to God, and that the way widows were treated was a sign of faithfulness to God.

The Old Testament is filled with commands about how the widow should be treated. In Exodus, the Lord tells Moses: “You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry.”¹ Later in Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people: “For the Lord your God... is not partial and takes no bribe...executes justice for the orphan and the widow...loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”² The law is replete with commandments about the alien, the widow, and the orphan. Verse after verse makes room for them, gives them a share. And why? Because the people of God were to remember that they were once slaves in Egypt. That they too had had nothing.³ Throughout Luke’s Gospel, widows also play a prophetic role. The widow Anna in the temple is one of the first witnesses to baby Jesus, praising God and speaking about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.⁴ Years

¹ Exodus 22:22-23

² Deut. 10:17-19

³ See Deut. 24:17-22

⁴ Luke 2:36-38

later, Jesus outrages elite, worldly power-worshipping synagogue crowds when he reminds them about the foreign widow at Zarephath to whom Elijah came during severe famine instead of to the “insiders.”⁵ Jesus exalts a poor widow who gave everything she had, two copper pennies, into the synagogue treasury.⁶ And today Jesus gives us another no-name widow, who needs justice against her opponent. Was she one of those widows whose house was being devoured by corrupt scribes?⁷ We are not told. But we know that her cause is just in an unjust world. We know that her persistent yes to God’s promises and her non-stop pressure on that good-for-nothing judge does bring change. Jesus’ parable is meant to ultimately point to the One who will vindicate. But along the way, he is showing all of us how to live lives of active faith and he is telling us to whom to look as models. Jesus constantly challenges us to look where we might not want to: to nobodies, into faces of those who suffer, into situations where injustice reigns, into places where there is no peace. Looking into those places is meant to shape our mission and our understanding of our assignment as followers of Jesus.

⁵ Luke 4:25-26

⁶ Luke 21:2-3

⁷ Luke 20:45-47

Were Jesus giving us this parable today, I wonder what widows he might invoke.

Would Jesus talk about Israeli War Widows for Peace⁸ who have seen enough violence and hatred, who are responding to God's call to love the stranger and to remember that they were once strangers, too?

Would Jesus tell us about 9/11 Widows who persist in pursuit of truth and information, even when they are derided and maligned?

Would Jesus point to Sudanese Widows⁹ from decades of conflict who band together to tell their stories to a world that keeps forgetting that genocide and civil war have not stopped?

Would Jesus call upon Iraqi Widows whose numbers continue to skyrocket, from all parts of society, from every side, whose futures are in peril because of lack of legal protection and equal rights?

⁸ http://coalitionofwomen.org/home/english/about/general_info/

⁹ <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/1121/p07s02-woaf.html>

Would Jesus name U.S. Military Widows, who have come together for moral support, who advocate for widows' rights, who go to the sources of power demanding answers when answers are not forthcoming?

To me, all of these widows' groups point to the kind of fervent and courageous faith Jesus wants to see when "the Son of Man comes on earth." Our assignment is to follow their lead. It's the assignment that was given us at baptism. Since the earliest centuries of the church, followers of Christ have been asking one another to live into this way of life, to say yes to these tasks as a response to God's already yes to us.

Trust God.

Proclaim Christ through word and deed.

Care for others and the world God made.

Work for justice and peace.

These are the parameters for actions large and small, for relationships, for society, for personal life and public witness. The parents of Warren and Kamden have already responded to this assignment. Kaitlynne and Ashlynne and their parents have already said yes to this assignment. Our new members are saying yes, and today each of us has yet another opportunity to re-center ourselves in this baptismal life and to figure out how we are keep being persistent, courageous followers and witnesses.

Now this is a tall order. But we have been given extremely full glasses! Our plates are heaping with grace and blessing! Spiritual gifts have been given; faith has been bestowed. You have a voice that God surely hears and others will too if only you keep it up.

Christian theologian Frederick Buechner puts it this way: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” The way I see it, Jesus is always about pointing us to the world’s deep hunger for connection, justice, peace, and mercy. Today’s Gospel is no exception. But Jesus is also about fullness of life, wholeness and hope. Jesus wants us to celebrate that which makes us deeply glad and to use that joy to connect with the world’s great need.

When we are about that kind of connecting, that kind of praying, that kind of journeying, what faith will Jesus find when he comes on earth! Amen