

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 11.01.15 Pentecost 24b*

Day One: 1 Kings 17:8-16

[The widow] went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

Do you ever complain? The widow in this story, during a time of drought and hunger, gave the last bit of her food to God's prophet, not knowing what God would do for her and her son.

It took great courage for this woman to give away the very last of her food, but the miracle she received was not what we might pray for. She did not receive a truck load of flour or a barrel of oil. She only saw in the jar the same too-little amount as the day before.

If this had been you, and when you returned home you found that once again you had only a little bit in the jar, what would you have said? In fact, isn't this an experience you've

had before? You have looked at your checking account or your refrigerator or your time, and you find that you have barely enough to get by.

You could say that she always had too little... or you could say that she always had just enough. Which one do you think you would have said? And every day, when it came time to prepare a meal, she would once again have to trust the Lord and use up her little bit. She did not get to exercise her faith just once, and then after that find that she was all set. No – she had to show that trust every day.

Where do you need to exercise trust in your Father? Where are you complaining the most about shortage? That's where you need to give what you have to God and trust that he will give back enough – perhaps not enough for what you want to do, but enough to do what he knows should be done in your life.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, how often have I looked at my things and muttered that it was not enough? Forgive me, Lord. And let me remember instead how you have given me all that I need, and more than I deserve. Amen.*

Day Two: Hebrews 9:24-28

For Christ did not enter a manmade sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

The letter to the Hebrews describes the temple as an imitation of heaven. Our church buildings, and even the famous Temple in Jerusalem, don't look much like heaven, do they? At least not heaven the way we tend to imagine it.

Our churches are not built on a cloud. They aren't covered in gold. And they are not enormous spaces worthy of the presence of God. But in a way they are like heaven. Can you think of how?

Yes, God lives in each of them. That is, He has promised to be with us whenever we worship there. But it's not only God who is present. The church, the Temple, and heaven are all places where God's people come together. We look forward to being united with others in heaven, just as we are (or should be) united with one another at church.

There are other similarities between church and heaven. We eat meals together at

church. Of course, a potluck meal might not seem very heavenly, but we also share a meal, the Lord's Supper, that reminds us of a great wedding feast in heaven.

But there is a similarity greater than all of these. Jesus stood up in the Temple in Jerusalem to preach and to teach, and pray, just as pastors preach, teach, and pray in our church. But when Jesus ascended to heaven he stood with his Father in an even more important way. He became our High Priest, the one who would testify to God on our behalf. A priest is a go-between, one who intercedes on behalf of others. Jesus has stood before the Father to vouch for us. He proclaimed, "This one is my forgiven lamb!"

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I am grateful for your presence in heaven to proclaim my salvation. But I often wish you were even closer to me here. Let my heart be a small corner of heaven for now, a place for your Spirit to dwell. Amen.*

Day Three: Mark 12:38-44

[Jesus said,] "I tell you the truth, 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."

What an amazing faith! If this were a movie, you can imagine how it would go. We'd start with an introduction to this woman, seeing her caring for others and making a life. Then something really bad would happen. Perhaps a thief would take the money for her rent, or she would have an accident.

Then comes the spiral downward. She would lose her job. Her friends turn away from her. The landlord wants the rent. She and her children are turned out into the street. And finally she is reduced to nothing more than two tiny copper coins.

What will she do? She makes her way slowly, painfully, to God's Temple where she stands in line beside the wealthy and the powerful, and she places her two precious coins in the offering. Someone sneers at her gifts, but Jesus raises his voice and praises her. And then? What happens next?

Well, of course we would now have the happy ending! An inheritance would be found, a missing ring would turn up, or an old debt would be paid. The woman would suddenly discover that she was rich!

But the way we write the story only shows what is most important to us. We still value being rich more than being in Christ. To us, the ending can only be happy if she is no longer poor.

Jesus did not promise that if this woman gave all her money she would get an abundance of money in return. And she did not give her money in order to make a profit. She gave her gift because of her love for God and her trust in him. She knew that if she was to survive it would depend upon God's grace, so she placed her life in God's hands. How could your faith be more like hers?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, even though I have often complained, I have far more wealth than this woman had. It's hard to let go of many good things that I love. But Lord, fill my hands with better things, gifts of your own choosing. Amen.*

Day Four: Mark 12:41-42

And [Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.

We're all impressed with the generosity, or the depth of trust, of this poor widow. Or at least we profess to be impressed.

Let's be honest. If all you had was two pennies, you might just as easily toss them in a wishing well. When I was a child, I was excited to find a penny on the sidewalk. But today people don't want to be bothered with pennies. It's too small an amount to be useful. What can a penny purchase?

Technically, of course, these coins were not pennies. They were "mites." Some of our translations call them pennies because our penny coin is a small copper coin, like the mite.

But it says that a mite (or "lepton" in Greek) was $\frac{1}{2}$ of a kodrantes. And, if you look it up, you find that a kodrantes was $\frac{1}{64}$ of a denarius, which was considered a fair wage for one day of work by a laborer.

So, if a laborer makes about \$15 per hour, then a denarius would be worth about \$120 today. And therefore a mite should equal about a dollar.

With two dollar coins you could get a couple of burgers from the dollar menu. With two dollar coins you could buy a loaf of cheap bread at the grocery store. If this is your last money, your last meal, would you offer it to God, trusting him to give you more?

That's not a hypothetical question. Today you have no promise that tomorrow will come. You have the hours of your life today, but you may not have them tomorrow. Will you use these precious hours to serve God who loves you – trusting that he will give you more time? Or must you serve yourself first?

Do not pray for more time. Pray for wisdom to use the time you have.

<p>These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at stpaulannarbor.org</p>
