

November 8, 2009
First Evangelical Lutheran Church
Idaho Falls, Idaho

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 17:8-16 Psalm 146 Hebrews 9:24-28 Mark 12:38-44

Dear Followers of Jesus Christ, the appointed Psalm for today, Psalm 146, begins with the words, “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.” As I read those words, I began to wonder just what it would look like to truly live out those words. What difference would it make in my life, in your life, in anyone’s life to truly strive to live in praise of God for a whole lifetime? I think the first part of this psalm kind of stuck with me because I felt a little guilty when I read those words. I know that I have not spent all my life long praising the Lord and singing praises to God.

There have been times in my life when I have been more devoted to following, supporting, and praising Boise State athletics than I have following and praising God. At one point in my twenties, I had season tickets to 4 different Boise State sports teams. I spent more money buying season tickets than I did supporting the mission of Christ at my local congregation. I spent more time in a sports arena or stadium than I did at church. And it was all a lot of fun, but at the end of the day, all of that money and time spent supporting Boise State athletics did not bring the long lasting purpose and peace and fulfillment that I think we all look for in our life. Where do you turn to find that long lasting purpose and peace and fulfillment in your life? If you name something other than God, what difference would it make in your life to truly strive to live the rest of your life in praise of God rather than something else?

I wonder about the two women, the two widows that we heard about this morning. Might their lives be an example of the difference it would make to live a lifetime of praise of God? Consider the widow at Zarephath. She was living during a time of severe drought, and the struggle for life was getting pretty desperate. In fact, she was about to run out of food for her and her son. They were down to just a handful of meal and a little oil in a jug. She was going to use it to prepare a meal and then wait to die, but then the prophet Elijah showed up and demanded of her, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink. Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” She tried to tell Elijah that she had nothing to give him; that there was only enough for one meal for her and her son. But Elijah insisted, “Do not be afraid; go and do as I have said. 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.” So, she went and did as Elijah said and, as a result, 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.

This story of the widow at Zarephath is an incredible story of extravagant giving, of obedience to God, and of utter dependence on God for the basic necessities of life. The story of the widow with the two small copper coins which were worth about a penny tells a very similar story to that of the widow at Zarephath. Those two coins were all she had. And yet, as Jesus watched the crowd putting money into the treasury, she walked up and put in those two coins. Seeing this, Jesus 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.”

How did these two widows do what they did – giving away all that they had: one to feed a prophet of the Lord in obedience to his commands and another giving away all she had in worship of her Lord? They both show utter dependence on God to take care of tomorrow and to take care of the basic necessities of life. They seem to have come to a place in their life where they have no fear of not having enough, where they are at peace with who they are, where they have placed complete trust in the Lord for everything in their life. How did they get to such a point in their life that they could do what they did?

I wonder if they knew the words of this Psalm 146, this Psalm that teaches us to “praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow.”

I don't know if these two widows were familiar with this psalm or not, but it sure seems to me like they were living examples of it. They seemed to know and trust that God would feed them, lift them up, love them, and uphold them. How about you and me today? Do we know and trust that God will feed us, lift us up, love us, and uphold us? Some days, we would probably answer yes. Other days, probably no.

I had a lot of fun those two or three years when Boise State athletics was the place where I spent a lot of time and money. I do regret, though, that at that time in my life, it was sporting events where I sought to be fed and lifted up. I was not at peace with who I was. I had not placed complete trust in God to bring me purpose and fulfillment in my life.

Jesus Christ offers you and me a fresh start. The reading from Hebrews tells us that Jesus has appeared once for all to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. He forgives and saves us from having to live in bondage to the regrets we may have in our life from following and looking to things other than God to find life long fulfillment, peace, and purpose.

When we find ourselves praising other gods in our life, whether they be sporting events, or work, or money, or other people – whatever it might be – our Lord gives us a fresh start – offering to us the peace and power that comes from his forgiveness. What a difference our Lord makes in our life. What a difference our Lord made in the lives of those two widows – living without fear of tomorrow, placing complete trust in God to feed them, lift them up, love them, and uphold them. Thanks be to God that we can live that same way, too. Amen.