

"A Gift That Cannot Be Taken Away"

Today we are very blessed to have 3 wonderful readings that deal specifically with how God responds when people put their trust in Him, simply having faith – because He is God! And so, let us begin with today's Holy Gospel reading from Mark 12. Jesus is in the Temple and describing the difference between true faith and a hypocritical "show" that is orchestrated for others to see. On the contrary - true faith comes from the heart and is not a show or demonstration for others – it is between you and God. Let's start with verse 41 in which, *"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts." "But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny." "Calling his disciples to him, 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.""* (Mark 12:41-44) This woman loved God so much that she wanted to honor Him by giving all that she had to live on and trusted that God would be faithful to her in return. She wasn't giving to get – she was giving because she had gotten and wanted to return to the Lord what was rightly His in the first place. I also want to suggest to you that she gave without fear of losing what she had – but wanted to give it to God.

Have you ever had something that you treasured – using it for God's glory? During these past 3 plus weeks I had something that I have been blessed to use in ministry – taken away from me very suddenly – my voice. I love to preach, teach, and for 50 years have been blessed to use my voice on the radio – especially with Contemporary Christian Gold – here in Douglas and on the internet – preaching the Gospel through music. In what would seem like a blink of an eye – after getting that doxycycline capsule lodged in my throat and coughing nonstop for about 20 minutes – my esophagus, throat and vocal chords became burned, inflamed and swollen. Eating, drinking, and speaking was so very painful. I must be honest with you - I was engulfed with fear. The emergency room could not really tell me much, except that I needed to see my ENT. God opened the doors for an appointment with the specialist at Mayo, Jacksonville, and I was given November 16th as my appointment – but then I received a call moving my date up a week to November 3rd. His appointments are usually several weeks out – but I believe that the Lord opened the door for us to go last Wednesday to Mayo. We were blessed to get a favorable prognosis – and medications to help me move forward. It was bad, but would get better with patience. Everything is not all the way back – but I know that God has got this and by His grace I will be ok – and continue to do His ministry. Thank you Jesus!

Today's Old Testament lesson from 1 Kings 17, the Prophet Elijah was directed by God to go to the town called Zarephath where he would find a widow who would provide him with food. He went and sure enough by the city gate there was a widow who was gathering sticks. He asked her for a drink of water and then added that he would like her to bring him a piece of bread. Her response was not what you might expect. She says *"As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread--only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a*

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jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it--and die.'" Elijah knew that God would provide for them because He had sent Elijah there, he tells her, *"Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son."* *"For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'* *"* Elijah trusted the Lord completely because He had seen God keep His promises and he was certain that the mercy of God would shine through.

The woman made the cake just as Elijah had told her and miraculously there was enough food for the three of them. That jar of flour was never used up and oil never ran dry. But there is more to this account about the woman's son. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, *"What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"* Elijah took him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed and he cried out to the LORD, *"O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?"* So then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, *"O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!"* The LORD heard Elijah and the boy's came back to life. Elijah picked up the boy and carried him downstairs. He gave him to his mother and said, *"Look, your son is alive!"* *"Then the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.'"* (1 Kings 17:17-24) What she said goes hand in hand with faith and that is truth! Jesus spoke about truth when He said in John 8:32 *"you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!"* He also told us where we can find the truth – and that is in Him – the living Word of God. On the night before He died, Jesus told His disciples *"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life, no one come to the Father except through Me."* (John 14:6) Truth, belief and faith go hand in hand! How many times have we heard through the Bible of people being healed simply because of their faith?

Today's New Testament reading from the author of Hebrews sets his readers straight about the Day of Atonement when the High Priest goes into the Holy of Holies sacrificing the blood of animals. This act for the forgiveness of Israel's sin is NOT what Jesus was doing on the cross at Calvary. If His dying was all about sacrificing someone else's blood every year – it would be meaningless – but the faith that Jesus had in the Father helped Him to fulfill what the Father commanded and would once, for all time satisfy the debt caused by the sins of the world – and His sacrifice would be once and timeless – carrying through to the final judgment. Jesus shed His own blood once. We as Anglicans believe that the only sacrifice that takes place during our service is the sacrifice of "ourselves, our souls and our bodies" – a living sacrifice – in thanksgiving and remembrance of what Jesus did for us as "the Lamb of God" – "who takes away the sins of the world." And *"so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people."* He has given us a gift that cannot be taken away! All three passages point to the gift that comes from belief, from faith - and that is eternal life. You may give all your money, all of your talent, everything you have – but your faith is forever – a gift that cannot be taken away.