

Mighty Mites

I Kings 17:8-16; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12: 38-44; Psalm 146 11-12-06

I struggled a long time with the title for this morning's sermon. I had another all set to go when "Mighty Mites" came into my head and no matter how hard I tried to "serious up," it would not leave. The only blessing in this was that the title is biblically based coming from the story Jesus told of the widow's mite.

As I reflected on the power of small bits and pieces coming together to make a united and strong force, I could not avoid thinking of last week's elections and the way votes, one at a time, came together to create a loud voice of concern for our dear country that could not be brushed aside and that will try to move it in another direction. Some of those votes are still being recounted to make sure all results are accurate. Whatever will happen remains to be seen. As someone once said, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Change comes to institutions but often very slowly. And, it seems that change that takes its time and that is well thought out has the most benefit for all involved. We must hope and pray that this change will lead to a wise course of action for our government and our country.

During this past week I also had a conversation with one of our younger folks about what it means to be "important." What does that mean? Do we need to be "important?" Probably, yes, at least to someone special. But what does it mean---to have some sort of power? To be well known and recognized? If that's what it means to us as Christians, what happens to Jesus' admonition that those who are first will be last and those who are last will be first? Are "important people" ever last? And what of those who are to be servants? We all are to fit that description. Are servants "important?"

I am sure Elijah thought the widow who fed him was important to his survival. Of course, she, as so many women, is un-named in our Bible, yet she was vital to this story. She was vital in doing what it was God had willed. Is that important? Were her mighty mites of meal and oil important? Yes, they were. They sustained life and allowed Elijah to continue on his mission.

The story of Elijah and the widow moves on through a miracle of never-ending oil and meal to one in which Elijah restores the woman's young son to life, making her realize that all she has done has been for someone who is a man of God; someone who is important in God's eyes. Did she know she was, also? Whether she did or not, she was. This should help us see and understand that everyone has an important role to play in helping to bring about the Kingdom of God.

Once again, a widow shows others the way in the little story from the Gospel of Mark about the widow's mite.

Collection boxes were not discreet instruments in the days of Jesus. No felt lined plates quietly passed from row to row. They were boxes attached to metal cones, somewhat like the old fashioned ear trumpets. When someone would make a donation to the Temple, they would walk up to the collection box, in front of everyone, and drop their coins into the box. The coins would rattle down the metal tube announcing the amount of money that was given. Large sums of money were being given by those who had much. Then the widow dropped in her two small coins making a significant sacrifice. She was

valued and noted by Jesus as a person of importance, though she certainly did not know it or show it.

This story comes directly on the heels of a comment about those who strut about making much of themselves. Jesus had commented on the scribes who thought themselves to be very important people. In Christ's value system they were not headed toward praise but toward condemnation because of their complete disregard for other people.

Their focus was on appearances only, not on what lies in the hearts of people. When we have lived a while, we often begin to realize that what is important is what a person is made of, not what he or she looks like or how he or she dresses. The importance of someone is carried in the way a person lives and moves and expresses his or her being.

There are times we would like to be responsible for making wonderful changes in the world and the life we see all around us. When we try, we may become discouraged by the little progress we seem to make and we stop in our attempts. I believe the reason we simply give up is that we expect things to change dramatically and quickly and in a big way. Most often we cannot effect huge change in one fell swoop. But we can make small moves toward making things better; moves that spread and take hold and then grow with the support of many. Any new idea requires preparation for acceptance and support. It requires those grassroots efforts that turn out a vote that change minds and hearts and that eventually succeed. It takes persistence and nurture. It requires gifts as small as a widow's mite cautiously dropped into the box of caring and concern.

Jesus understood this process as he went about planting seeds of thought that would lead to action. He told us he well understood the difficulty of human acceptance of any challenges that ran counter to the status quo. He knew many of his teachings would fall on infertile, rocky soil. But, he also knew that there were those patches of rich soil where thoughts and ideas would take root and grow beyond all reason.

Elijah understood the same need for persuasive persistence. He pushed the widow to become a hostess in spite of herself—to allow her to open herself up enough to offer hospitality when she believed she had nothing left to give and that death was on her doorstep. Even her small gifts, her mighty mites, were treasured.

I needn't tell you that we are in the opening stages of our yearly pledge drive. You have received a letter. Pastors do not like to talk about money and I promise this will be the only time. We especially do not like to talk about your money and how you should use it. As a Congregationalist, I know that we all possess consciences that guide us in our stewardship and in all areas of life and that what we donate to the church is between us and God. But, I also know from past experience, that when I give to causes beyond myself generously, there always seems to be more money than I need. It's a little like Elijah's widow sharing her oil and meal with him. From her store of it more came. I do not know exactly how this works, but when I put good causes first I always seem to have enough. It's all about what we believe is important in life. It's a question we all must answer for ourselves. It is a question we must ponder for ourselves and wonder what it would be like if this place were no longer here as an operating house of worship but became a quaint and lovely museum of things and ways of the past.

The world has changed dramatically since this place was first established; loyalty to the church and to God has slipped. Life has intruded in so many ways. It is time to pause a bit and reflect on how it is we have contributed to this change and then decide how to provide programs that will begin to reverse it. I do not think that we here, or in any other place, will ever be able to go back to where we were thirty years ago. So, our job is to plant our feet where we are and discover new ways to build the Kingdom right where we are in service to others. This requires time and treasure and talent from each and every one of us according to our ability. The task, which lies before us, is difficult but we are blessed by the fact that the laborers are many and growing in number and dedication and interest. We need to remember that while it is a large task it can be accomplished best through the mighty mites of many. Amen