



He who has given someone his heart will also give him his purse.

– Martin Luther –

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

1 Kings 17:8–16

It was a desperate situation that the widow of Zaraphath was in. She and her son were near death from starvation when Elijah came to her and asked for a drink of water and a cake the size of her hand. She replied that all she had was a handful of flour and a small amount of oil and that would be their last meal together before they died. Elijah assured her of God's promise to keep her jar full and her flour replenished until the rains came to supply more.

- How was the widow's generosity a sign of her trust in the Lord? How does the way we use our resources show where our trust lies?
- In what ways do we use the metaphor of "hand" or "in hand" to signify what we own or control? In reality, from whose "hand" do we receive all things?
- What other stories from the Bible can you think of where God provided sustenance for people who were near death or were extremely distraught? What do these stories tell us about trusting in God's providence?

Psalm 146

The psalmist urged Israel not to trust in human beings. Men are only mortals and when they die they return to the dust of the earth. On the other hand, the Lord is the one that can be trusted. God's wisdom and understanding far surpass any knowledge that humans might have. Only God can save; other people cannot!

The basis of all idolatry is trusting in someone or some thing *other* than the Lord God. This inability to trust in God is what theologians call "original sin." We are no different today than those who came thousands upon thousands of years before us. We put our trust in that which we can see, and we ignore the One we cannot see. (See also 2 Corinthians 4:18.) We expect created things to save us and give us security, but it rarely works for long.

- Why do you think human beings continue to make the same idolatrous mistakes over and over, from generation to generation?
- Often, the most tempting idols in our lives are genuinely good things, in themselves. What are some good things you find yourself clinging to, when you should be trusting in God?

Hebrews 9:24–28

Christ's sacrificial offering of himself on the cross was the superior offering to forgive the sins of those who believe.

Other high priests had to offer sin offerings on behalf of their own sin, as well as the sins of those who came to the Temple. Not so with Jesus. Jesus did not have to give an offering for himself. His offering was the once and for all offering made for the sins of all humanity. He was the authentic, one of a kind sin-offering which cannot be copied.

- Have you ever purchased a "knock off" product? Was the quality the same? Did it leave something to be desired?
- How is Jesus' sacrificial death the "real thing" as compared to the sacrifices of the high priests who preceded him?

The author of Hebrews instructed his audience that when Christ comes again it will be to save those who eagerly await his return. This will be a different mission than his first advent, when he came to die on the cross to offer forgiveness and new life. Upon his return he will not be concerned with the matter of sin, only with reunion.

- Why is Christ's return going to be more like a family reunion, rather than an altar call? What does that mean for those who do not believe in him?

Mark 12:38–44

The widow in Mark's Gospel is as generous to the treasury as the widow who gave her last bit of flour and oil to feed Elijah. Both gave all they had in service to the Lord. Both trusted that they would be cared for in their destitution. Jesus pointed to the woman in the temple as an example of generosity. She was one who put her trust in God and knew him to be the source of her life and well-being. That's not a small thing to do! Trust has a whole lot to do with things that cannot be seen – including our future financial situation.

- Is it easier to trust in God when we have plenty? Is that still "faith" when we know we already have what we need?

Perhaps you know someone who is very much like these widows; a person who is generous with all they have, especially those who have little or nothing to their name. It is easy to give out of our abundance. We don't even miss it most days. But to give the last penny we have is an act of devotion and abiding faith in the one who provides for all our needs.

- Is generosity something we learn or something we simply have? If you learned it, who did it you learn it from?
- Do you really trust that God will provide for all your needs? Even if you would give away your last penny?
- What keeps us from trusting the providence of God? Do we not have enough evidence of his love for us?