

**Sermon Notes – November 10, 2024 - All Saints Sunday**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Mark 12: 38-44**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“The Offering of the Widow”**

Today’s Old Testament reading from 1 Kings gifts us with the telling of the generosity of the destitute widow towards Elijah. But also in the Old Testament, another widow’s generosity bears equal weight: Ruth births the child who will become David's ancestor, and the neighbors who name him understand the greatness of the impact that he is also widow Naomi's last and dearest contribution to Israel's “house.”

We then go to today’s lectionary reading from 1 Kings 17. The prophet Elijah appears out of nowhere, standing as a nemesis to Ahab and Jezebel, the charismatic pair who had reestablished in Israel the old Canaanite cult of Baal, god of all things agricultural. According to the story of YHWH, Baal's impotence is exposed when Elijah is sent to live in the desert, where his food will come from ravens and his drink from a wadi. Ravens eat roadkill, and a desert Wadi is the ficklest of waterways. This is life lived on the edge.

When the water fails altogether, God sends Elijah to the home of the destitute widow who has one last morsel of food for herself and her son. Reluctantly, she practices culturally dictated hospitality and shares these meager morsels with Elijah, who promises the reward of a miraculous larder that will never fail to hold just enough ingredients for making another loaf of bread. Soon after, the widow's son dies and Elijah is instrumental in YHWH's restoring the boy's life. Thus does YHWH demonstrate, to poor folks anyway, that it is Israel's God, and not Baal, who grants life and sustenance to humankind.

As the lectionary pairing suggests, this story has traditionally served as the lens for seeing the meaning of the widow's remarkable offering that Jesus observes at the temple (Mark 12). Like the widow encountered by Elijah, this woman too gives away her last hope of survival. How noble and trusting! We don't learn, however, if the Jerusalem widow ever discovers she has a miraculous, never-empty purse to sustain her, even if she remained on the edge.

Jesus' response to this scene contains a hint of a scandal. In the preceding verses, Jesus has condemned how outwardly pious, rich, clever scribes "devour widows' houses" (Mark 12: 40) simply because they can, and then he shames the rich who fail to match the generosity of the faithful poor. In truth, the temple hauled in more wealth than any institution besides the empire, and now it had the widow's last penny too. Is this what God desires?

Even more sobering, perhaps, are Jesus' words immediately after this scene. He says the temple is doomed. Soon it will fall and disappear (Mark 13: 2), and when it does, not only the rich folks' investment, but the widow's too, will have come to nothing. Even sooner, the temple that is Jesus' person will likewise fall (see the allusion in Mark 14: 58). He, like the widow, will give away everything, and his offering too will appear a sorry waste.