

Widows

Felicity O'Brien, June 6th, 2010 at Longview. All rights reserved.

1 Kings 17:9-16
Luke 7:12-16

Two of today's readings feature widows. Some of you may have been widowed, or may have been brought up by a widowed mother. You will know how hard it can be to survive. I have not been a widow but I was separated and had to raise my children on my own for a while, until I met my second husband.

The story about the widow from Zarephath has three main points that jump out for me.

First, she was a Gentile. Zarephath is in Sidon, and this was the territory of Jezebel, Elijah's enemy. This means that Elijah was the first prophet to bring God's message to the Gentiles.

Second, the widow knew who he was, and knew that he worshipped a God different from her own. "As the Lord your God lives," she said. She was acknowledging God's power. She had faith, even without belonging to the Jewish culture and religion.

Third, she is so humble, that she brings the water that Elijah requests, and doesn't say anything about her plight. But when he asks to share her meager supplies, she makes her dire situation known to him. He immediately reassures her – do not be afraid. What compassionate words! I can relate to the widow from Zarephath, - I know what it was like to look in the cupboard and find almost nothing there. In fact, this reading used to be very comforting to me in those days.

I sense Elijah, and God, saying to the widow, what *do* you have? He is asking her to look at what she does have – in her case only a little flour and a few drops of oil – rather than looking at what she doesn't have.

You could say, is the glass half-full or half empty? The widow has very little, but she agrees to share it, and in this obedience to God's prompting she is blessed. Her faith is a blessing, and the provision for her is a blessing. She doesn't miraculously have a whole pantry full of food, but what she has never runs out, and she is able to survive and support her child while the rest of her country is in the grip of a famine.

What can this reading be saying to us? Well, I believe it is a challenge to look for the blessings in our life – to look for what we do have, and not to focus on what we don't have.

Many of you here in Longview suffer from the pains and illnesses of old age, and you have lost a lot of your health. But what do you still have? Do you have your faith? What can you still do? These are questions this reading asks of us all.

Our Luke reading also features a widow, and in this case her only son had just died. In the first century a widow was supported by her children, and without her son she was doomed to be destitute. Losing a child is a terrible thing, but in her case there was also her future to be fearful of. But Jesus had compassion on her.

He didn't need to ask her why she wept, or what he could do for her. There was only one thing that would change her life for the better. And Jesus restored the young man to life, giving his mother not only her dear son back, but also her dignity and support.

The young man reacted in the most natural way –he began to speak. I wonder what he said? Mum, I've just had the strangest dream – where am I? why are you crying? Or maybe he knew what had happened, and began to praise and thank God for his restored life. We will never know. This was a very public event, and Jesus' reputation grew throughout the land.

What is this reading saying to us? That Jesus is compassionate, that he knows our needs, before we can even utter them to him. He is always available, and we can always come to him in prayer. The faith of the widow from Zarephath, and the compassionate care she received, are echoed in the widow from Nain.

Our reading also tells us that God cares for the people on the outskirts, and that can mean Gentiles in the Jewish context, - all the poor, the humble, the widow, the young man cut off as life was beginning. He knows our faith, even when no-one else does. He is not just interested in the powerful, healthy, wealthy, young and glamorous. Just as well really, - most of the world doesn't fall into those categories. Whoever you are, whatever condition you are in, God loves you, and that's why He sent Jesus to the earth, so that you can live with him forever.