



The Widows of Scripture
I Kings 17:8-16
June 9, 2013

Today's Old Testament scripture passage from the lectionary is about a widow. The Gospel reading for today from the lectionary is about a widow. The Bible talks about widows – a lot. Perhaps, there were a lot of widows in biblical times.

Women married older men who died before they did, often leaving the widow in poverty because the husband was the source of economic support. As the result, the widow made the list of the poorest of the poor alongside the orphan and landless immigrant.

The widow was in a no-man's land (pun intended). She had little inheritance rights for land passed down through the fathers and sons. She had left her family to get married, and with her husband's death, the bond between her and his family could be shaky.

Because of the widow's low standing in society, God provided for the widow in His law. She was allowed to glean the fields during harvest time. Provision was made for her during main religious feasts. Every couple of years, a portion of the grain tithe given to the temple was designated for the widow. If people oppressed the widow, God directly intervened to punish the exploiters (Exodus 22:24). If the widow was cared for, the person was blessed. (Deut 14:29)

So, you get the idea. Life for the widow was difficult, but God provided for her. Today, however, I do not want to dwell on the struggle and poverty of the widow in biblical times and the charge to take care of them. That is important, but I believe there is another reason why widows are in scripture.

And it is this: **Widows serve to alert us that something significant is about to be presented in the Bible.** Therefore, we need to pay attention when a widow appears in scripture because something significant is about to be presented in the Bible. So, we are going to take a look at some of these widows to see what is of importance that God is communicating with us.

I know many of you here are widows. You know that widowhood signals a new season, a new time in a woman's life. It is not an easy time. But I hope by the time we are

finished this morning, by looking at the value of widows in scripture, you will see the value in your season as a widow.

And I know there are many of you out there who are not widows. This does not give you permission to take a nap. You need to listen as well. I hope by the time we are finished this morning, for you who are not widows, you will see the value of the widows among you, how God uses them in mighty ways.

I invite you to turn with me to a story of a widow found in I Kings 17. Let us pray.

Prayer: Move in our hearts, O God, and open these words of Scripture to us today. Help us to hear with fresh ears and willing hearts the life-giving message you have for us. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

Read I Kings 17:7-16

This story takes place during a drought in the land, and a young prophet by the name of Elijah is hungry and thirsty. He is led by God to a widow who is hungrier and thirstier than he is. In fact, she is on her last meal. And God says to Elijah: this widow is going to meet your needs.

There is a lot of faith that needs to be applied here. Elijah needs to believe God when God says the widow will supply food and water for him even though he knows she is on her last meal. The woman needs to believe Elijah when he says that she will not die if she feeds him first. As a result of their faith in believing what God says, a miracle happens.

This story, however, is more than just about faith. It is about how God uses a widow, a person of low social standing. God uses this widow to encourage his young prophet who is not only trying to survive a drought, but he is also on the run from an evil king.

God uses this widow to authenticate that Elijah is a true prophet. In the verses following this story, the widow's son dies and Elijah heals him. The woman says this, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is true." What an encouragement to a young prophet of God who is on the run from his enemies.

I believe God uses this widow to prepare Elijah for an even bigger task when he has a showdown with a foreign god in front of hundreds of people (which is in the next chapter). He can easily make a fool of himself in front of all these people, but I bet as he stands in front of those people, he hears the words of the widow: You are a man of God and the word of the Lord in your mouth is true.

He wins the battle and becomes a legendary figure. He becomes so great that people thought John the Baptist was Elijah returned. He becomes so great that he was seen

with Jesus and Moses during Jesus' transfiguration. He becomes so great that many Jews still await his appearance as a predecessor to the Messiah. And God used a widow to help train him in.

God used this widow in other ways as well. God used her to show that God's care extended beyond Israel. She wasn't an Israelite; she was an outsider.

God uses this widow to teach us, to show that sometimes we need to let go in order to receive, that if we let go of our strangle hold on our resources, we discover the abundant resources of God.

God uses this widow to show that hospitality to a stranger may be responsible for our own survival.

This is a significant story in the Bible. Because of this woman's faith, we read her story 3000 years later. A widow – the poorest of the poor. Used by God.

There are other widows of scripture, seemingly insignificant, but God honors them in very significant ways. Here are a few of them:

Tamar (Genesis 38). Now, this is a very strange story to our modern American ears. Tamar is widowed and the next eldest brother does his duty by marrying her. Before he can give her a son, he dies. The next brother must marry her but he refuses because he thinks he will die like his brothers, but he dies anyway.

The next brother is too young, so she is invited to move into her father-in-law's home to wait for the youngest to get old enough to marry her. The family never gives this son to Tamar. So Tamar takes matters into her own hands, disguises herself as a prostitute, sleeps with her father in law, and becomes pregnant.

Now, I know this is not the way to solve problems, but listen to this. Remember I said that when a widow appears in scripture something significant is about to be presented. Tamar has twins by her father-in-law, and one of those twins is listed in the genealogy of Jesus.

Not only is Tamar's son listed, but Tamar is one of the 4 women listed in Jesus' genealogy. In that time, it is not normal to list a woman in a genealogy. By claiming her right to her husband's land and doing something about it, she is honored by God in an amazing way by becoming a descendant of the Messiah. Pretty significant!

Ruth and Naomi (the Book of Ruth): Naomi not only loses her husband, but her two sons die as well leaving 2 more widows and no heirs. All seems lost. She describes herself as bitter and afflicted by the Lord. But God has a plan to restore her honor in a very significant way – a way that we remember today.

Naomi moves back to her hometown of Jerusalem along with one of daughter-in-laws, Ruth, herself a widow, and begins to put her life back together again. She does so in a very interesting way: she becomes a matchmaker. For her daughter-in-law. It works, and Naomi gains a grandchild. Not just any grandchild. He becomes the grandfather to King David – the greatest king in Jewish history AND he is listed in Jesus' genealogy. Two widows – honored by God in a very significant way.

Let's go to the New Testament. The New Testament says this I Timothy 5:5-6): "The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help." This is certainly true of Anna (Matthew 2)

Anna is married for seven years when her husband dies. She decides to dedicate herself to God and lives in the temple. She worships God day and night by praying and fasting, and she becomes known as a prophet.

God acknowledges her devotion. At the age of 84, she meets the infant Jesus and she knows who he is. She celebrates his arrival by speaking of how he will redeem Jerusalem. This was her shining hour recorded forever in scripture. A widow honored by God to proclaim the Messiah Jesus. Pretty significant!

Are you catching a theme here with Jesus and widows? Jesus continues this theme as he encounters widows in his ministry.

Jesus heals the son of a widow (Luke 7:11-17). The people who witness the miracle are filled with awe and praise God by saying, "A great prophet has risen among us." God uses a widow to point to Jesus' role as prophet. Yes, Jesus healed this woman's son because he had great compassion on her, but God used this miracle to show, as Jesus claimed, that he came to bring good news to the poor. A fulfillment of the OT. A widow, honored by God, to proclaim the Messiah Jesus. Again, significant!

Jesus used widows to teach.

Jesus gives a parable about a widow who approaches a judge persistently (Luke 19:1-8). The parable begins this way: "Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart." A widow – used as an example of how not to give up.

And then, there is the story of how Jesus acknowledges the widow who gives out of her poverty (Luke 21:1-4). He watches her as she gives her few coins in the temple. He uses her as a lesson in giving and compares her to the rich who give out of their prosperity.

Ellen White wrote: "The influence of that little gift has been like a stream. . . . In a thousand ways it has contributed to the relief of the poor and the spread of the gospel.

Her example of self-sacrifice has acted and reacted upon thousands of hearts in every land and in every age.”

Some call this “The Widow’s Mite.” But we should call it “The Widow’s Might.” A widow – honored by Jesus in a very significant way.

The position of Deacon is born because widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:1-6). Widows are the reasons why we have Deacons in the church today. I think that is pretty significant!

And then there is Mary, the mother of Jesus. The last time Joseph, her husband, is mentioned in the Gospels is when Jesus is 12 years old. Many people believe she became a widow before Jesus began his ministry. Maybe this is why Jesus honored widows so much – because His mother was one.

She followed him in his ministry. She was there at his crucifixion. She was there in the upper room meeting with the disciples at the day of Pentecost and became a follower of The Way.

Widowhood offered new opportunities for women. If you are a widow, I hope you saw that today. When the husband dies, the woman dies to her old life, but she rises to her new calling as a Christian widow.

I hope you have seen today that biblical widows were not weak and hopeless.

Biblical widows were strong, intelligent, beautiful, inspirational, determined, and focused. They raised children that changed the history of the world. These women gave us many powerful and encouraging examples. Through their lives we learn that widowhood is not the end of their success, but it can be the beginning of a new and God-focused life, a life that God honors.

I end with this promise from scripture. It was originally given to Israel because the concept of widowhood was often used a metaphor to describe God’s relationship to Israel. But it is for you as widows today as well: "You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband; the Lord Almighty is his name" (Isaiah 54:4-5).

Amen and amen.

