**1 Kings 17:8-16 November 11, 2018**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Text for this morning comes from our Old Testament lesson, 1 Kings chapter 17 here re-reading these words. “Then the word of the Lord came to him (meaning the prophet Elijah), “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Welcome to Widow Sunday. We are moving into the festival season of the Church year and you’ve gotten to experience the Red of Reformation, hearing about Martin Luther. You’ve basked in the white of All Saints’ Day, remembering those who have gone before us. And now you come back to the green, the “normal” or “regular” color to…Widow Sunday. Doesn’t quite match the celebration of Reformation Day does it? It’s not really in the same experience of remembering the joy and gladness that our loved ones are experiencing in heaven worshipping the Lamb of God on the throne like we did for All Saints’ Day. But that doesn’t mean we should disregard these faithful women. Look at the widows of our Old Testament and Gospel lessons. One is found gathering sticks in order to make one last meal and die with her son. The other enters the temple and gives 2 insignificant small copper coins. Remarkably these women of faith that we remember and focus on this Sunday are so lowly we don’t even know their names. Yet we have much to learn from them.

For faith is truly understood in the word: “Reliance” And widows at the time of Elijah and Jesus were reliant upon others for their own wellbeing. Widows would not be set up for cushy lives when they lost their spouses, instead they would be faced with the reality of no job, no land, and in many cases no hope. They would be put in a place of reliance upon others. They were lowly and forgettable, they were beggars and offered very little to society and the community. It makes sense that nobody would really even know their names.

There was nothing to be gained from knowing them. And if you are important you need people to know your name. We just got through election day, and the name of the game, the reason that so much money is spent on campaign ads and signs and stickers and buttons is to get your name out there. If you want to be elected you need people to know who you are. You need to be recognizable in the marketplaces, you need to be elevated by others to a place of prominence so that your influence can be seen by how much people pay attention to you and want to be seen with you. It’s how the game works. It’s how the scribes are described in our Gospel lesson, the ones who are walking around, shaking hands, kissing babies, ones that others point to and know that they are special and important people. They take the best seats, and yet, they also devour the widows house. Why? The widows offer them nothing. The widows aren’t worth the trouble.

Which makes our Old Testament lesson so miraculous, and I invite you to put yourself in the shoes of the prophet Elijah. Here is a man who is on the run, living in the wilderness, being cared for by God and ravens by a brook, until it dries up. God says, “go to Zarephath which belongs to Sidon”, meaning an area that Elijah has never been, and where Elijah won’t know anyone. “Go and dwell there”, live there is what God is saying, and “you will find help in the form of a widow who will feed you.” Now think about that for just one second. You are on the run, you are alone and heading into a strange and foreign place. You have to find help and shelter so where do you go?

It was a common practice at my home congregation in Michigan, that there would be times that a stranger would come to the door of the parsonage and ask for the pastor. My Dad would meet with them and they would have long talks out on the porch or on the step of the front door. Sometimes Dad would go into the garage and get the gas can and put gas into their car, he would point them toward the nearby town of Auburn and he would otherwise try to assist them. These were individuals who were down on their luck. They needed gas to get somewhere, they needed money in order to get back home, they needed food to eat and didn’t know where else to go, so they came to the church. Dad would always try to help them, but was wary about giving out cash because of those who would misuse the church’s generosity for their own selfish benefit. In Texas, at my Vicarage congregation we had gift cards to gas stations and other grocery stores in the area for this purpose. It’s not a crazy idea to go to the church to find help.

If you were alone in a new town and needed help you could go to an LCMS congregation and say that you are a member of St. John in Palmer, KS and ask for help. Hopefully they would provide some assistance. That option wasn’t available for Elijah. This was not an area that believed in the true God. They were followers of Eshmun, a pagan god and this is shown in the words of the widow, “As the Lord *your* God lives” she says, not her God, but the God of Elijah. He didn’t have any help based upon his faith.

You’d think God would send him to someone important in that area, a government official, someone rich, someone who would be well equipped to take care of him. When you’re going to knock on someone’s house to beg and ask for help, you probably go to the biggest house, they obviously have money. No one goes to the broken down, abandoned house looking for help. You don’t beg from a beggar! Yet Elijah is sent to a widow, a widow in the midst of a drought, and that’s who is going to help him.

A no name widow. He asks her for water. There’s a drought! This wasn’t like she would just go up to the faucet and get him tap water compared to sparking bottled water, any water was a huge thing to ask for. And miraculously she says she’ll get him some. So he asks her for food. Food from a widow. A widow who is gathering sticks, not logs, so she can eat her last meal and die in peace. And still, she explains the situation and he promises her she will be cared for. This pagan widow, who shows such great faith, that she helps this representative of God, and is saved by the miraculous providing of the Almighty God. Her jar of oil was not spent until the next rain. Her cup literally overflowed which reminds us of the words of Psalm 23. “You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.” That’s how God gives, a never ending and continuous blessing.

But the story isn’t recorded for us to think that good things will come if we just give and give until it hurts. That we should follow the example of these widows, the one who cares for Elijah and the other who gave all her money to the church because we will be blessed. There was no blessing recorded for the widow who gave the small copper coins, for all we know she left the temple and faced very hard and harsh days, begging for food. What we marvel at on Widow Sunday is their faith. The faith of a woman who would take the little water and food she had, and feed a man who was sent by a God she didn’t know, yet still respected and identified. The faith of a woman who would give even when in poverty and give not from her abundance but give with a true reliance upon God to care of her.

We observe Reformation Day, to look back on the work of Martin Luther and how he freed the Gospel so that we would have a faith that clings to Christ and not ourselves. We remember All Saints’ Day to remember the saints to learn from their example, to be reminded of what they are experiencing and what we too will experience when we go to be with Christ. And on Widow Sunday, we learn from these women that faith is the true reliance upon God to care and provide. Faith is giving not from abundance but off the top, first fruits giving, a true stewardship of ourselves and our time and our treasures with no regard and hinderance because we know it all comes from God in the first place. This lesson is well learned from this widow, but it’s not the only point. For faith is created in us and therefore faith is the work of God the Holy Spirit. Faith is the recognition that when it comes to our relationship with God we are as widows. We are as insignificant as widows. We are as reliant as widows. We are as useless to society as a widow was at that time, and the difference is, that while the scribes failed the widows who relied upon them, and while we fail those who rely upon us and look down upon those who can’t offer us anything of importance, while we disregard those of a lesser estate and look only to gain favor with the powerful, the rich, and the important, those who have a huge name and a large following, and fame, God looks upon us with mercy and love, and cares for us, and provides for our one true need in the person of His Son Jesus Christ.

For we have no need to fear in relying upon God, for He keeps his promises to care for us, His children. We are dependent upon him, and he is faithful, he is trustworthy, he is loving, and he provides. Not in the form of an abundance at all times here on Earth, not that we can look for the never ending jar of oil, or that we can expect a big truck of money and possessions to come if we only give all we have away. But instead he provides for our one true need in salvation, by His Son dying and rising, so that no matter what happens to our lives, or our stuff, or our source of income, or our house, if it were all burned up tomorrow, if you were like your brothers and sisters in Christ, in California, who are waking up to a reality that their house is gone, but also their own LCMS Church has been destroyed, if all that we have here in Palmer were all destroyed in a great calamity, and we were reliant upon others for everything, we would know that God still provides for our salvation, by forgiving us, strengthening us, and feeding us in this Holy Meal for our forgiveness.

That’s worth celebrating. That’s a lesson learned, from the Widows. So don’t expect it to be an every year observance. Don’t think that we will make hats, or t-shirts, or put out signs and posters that Widow Sunday is coming! Instead recognize that every Sunday is an opportunity to learn and grow from God’s Word which reveals the great heroes of the faith, the saints that we learn from and follow their examples in this life. And see this Sunday, that you can learn a ton from Martin Luther. That there is a never ending amount of lessons and examples to be seen from the multitude of saints. But that you also can learn from the widows. You can learn your place before God, and how you rely upon him for everything. You can see a picture of true stewardship, but ultimately you can see that faith is reliance and your faith in God is not wasted or taken advantage of. You can rely upon God because his love is continuous and overflowing, like a cup that never runs out.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.