

What Happened Next?

1 Kings 17: 8-16

Mark 12: 38-44

November 8, 2009

United Memorial

Have you met Jesus?

I didn't until the day I went to the temple to put my offering in. I had heard about him of course, and that day is written down in your scripture...

That day when Jesus had some pretty harsh words for the rich...

But, I am getting ahead of myself.

I want to take you back to the story you heard last week.

When Jesus had a conversation with one of the scribes.

And then... WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

Well Jesus and this scribe were talking...

Some people thought they were arguing...

But they weren't, they were just talking...

The scribe knew that Jesus was an important teacher and he wanted to know what law or commandment Jesus thought was the most important...

And Jesus gave him an answer which all the priests and scribes could agree on and he said, "Love the lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind... this is the greatest commandment."

And then... WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

He added something else, he said, "And love your neighbour as yourself."

This wasn't new though... this came from our book of Deuteronomy... but it was the first time it has been linked with the first commandment.

I thought about those words often...

Yes, the first commandment was easy... of course love of God was the first and foremost in my life... even though my life wasn't easy...

But to love my neighbour as myself? What did that mean?

You haven't forgotten that I am widow have you?

When people read my story, they often think that I was old.

But, as you can see, I am not!

No, I am not a young girl... but I am still a young woman... still with strength and pride and hope...

But in that time, I was nothing... no man to protect and provide for me... dependent on the generosity of distant cousins... my only hope was to find another husband... and the chances of that were slim because I had no close male relative to speak for me...

And then... WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

Well, what happened next is that I thought for a long time about what loving my neighbour as myself meant...

I had heard that Jesus taught that loving our neighbour as ourselves meant feeding the poor, visiting the sick and imprisoned and setting free all those who were enslaved by systems that oppressed them.

How could a poor widow do that? I had virtually no financial resources...

In fact, there were many times that I went to the temple that I wished I could take something out of the offering boxes!

There were people who came, rich people in embroidered robes...

Some of them made a big show of how much they put in... they wanted everyone to know that they were important people...

Some of them, quietly and with dignity, put large sums in and I longed to be able to be that generous...

Some were ordinary people... doing their best to follow the God's commandment to give a percentage of their income to the temple in order for those less fortunate than them to live with dignity... with the basics of human life... food, shelter and clothing...

People like me...

And then... WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

Well, what happened next was that I remembered the story of another widow... you heard it earlier...

The one from whom Elijah sought refuge and food... and that the small amounts of flour and oil never gave out until the rains came and there was more food...

While such reliance on God was challenging... I realized that I had two coins... no, they were not much... but they were something...

And I remembered that I had food and shelter and clothing... even if it wasn't much and even if I wasn't head of my own household...

And there were many who did not... many who did not eat every day... many who slept out in the open air... many who wore rags to cover themselves...

And then... WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

I began the walk to the temple... there was a long line up to deposit money in the treasury.

You see, it wasn't like it is in your churches... where all are welcome regardless ability to make an offering.

We put money in the treasury before we were allowed into the temple... and one of the scribes recorded it in a book and announced it as he wrote it.

I understand that you record what people give as well... but it is done in private so that the amount of your offering is between you and God...

And I think there are benefits to both systems... announcing the amount of the offering could encourage people to be more generous... but it might also embarrass those whose financial resources were not as abundant, but who gave what they could, faithfully, week after week...

Anyway, back to the line-up... it was long...

There was a man who wore a robe with gold thread...

He had rings on his fingers... and a servant was holding a big bag of money and he announced in a very loud voice that this was his offering and after the scribe recorded it asked him to repeat the amount so that all in the line-up could hear.

And then... WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

There was some muttering... some foot shuffling... some discomfort and I heard comments like, "Yes, he gave a big bag of money, but he has 2000 more of those bags at his household." And, "Who does he think he is, is he trying to buy his way into heaven?"

There was another man, a plainly dressed man, with no rings or embroidered robes, who also offered up a big bag of money.

He handed it over to the scribe and said, "I hope this will help look after the widows and orphans in our community, and if you need more, you know where to find me, I have brought a tenth of all I have, but I would gladly give more.

And then it was my turn... I had these two coins... and I put them in the box, the scribe recorded them...

And then... WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

Jesus spoke!

He had been sitting there watching the people come to the treasury, and he called his disciples over and said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

He was talking about me! My two small coins were important!

But it seems to me that your world needs much more than two coins and pennies... and you have the ability to give more than that...

And then... WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

I don't know... what happens next is up to you... but remember the commandments... "Love the lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind... this is the greatest commandment."

"And love your neighbour as yourself." Amen.