



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

November 8, 2009

Proper 27B
By Reverend Donna Barr

One of the things I appreciate most about my accountant husband is that, in spite of my years of whining and uninterest, he has persisted in helping me understand and be somewhat knowledgeable in financial matters. I now proudly announce that I happily, as a matter of routine, gather up the checkbook and receipts, pay the bills and reconcile my checkbook. I'm not a spender..... I even like to see how much I can save. But in part that's because I like being prepared for what's to come tomorrow.

For most of us I imagine having money in the bank gives us a sense of security and stability in our lives. It also gives us a sense of power and of freedom. If we have a certain amount of money we not only can pay the bills and put food on the table, but we can go to amazing places and do amazing things. Doors are opened for us and for our children that without the resources wouldn't be. And so we spend an awful lot of time trying to preserve our money and our resources. We worry about what will happen to us if we lose it. We hold tightly to it, afraid of letting go. Too often, however, our money can end up controlling us and taking away any real power or freedom we thought we had.

The two widows we hear about in our scripture passages do not have any sense of security or freedom. In ancient Israel a widow was at the very bottom of the food chain. Without the

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protection and care of her husband, she was completely vulnerable in society. If a male relative did not take pity on her and receive her and her children into his household, she found herself in abject poverty often times begging on the streets, living homeless and resorting to prostitution. Even in the midst of such desperate conditions, uncertain of what might happen to them tomorrow, uncertain whether they would eat again or find shelter again, the widow of Zarephath and the widow in the temple treasury, are willing to give away the little resources they have acquired: a handful of meal to make bread, a little oil in a jug and two coins. It is difficult for us who have savings accounts, stock portfolios and investments to fathom the costliness and sacrifice of such actions. In their courageous acts of faith, these women let go of even the smallest amount of security and put their whole trust in their God.

The remarkable stories of these widows reminds me of my friend The Rev. Corky Carlisle's experience visiting an Anglican Church while on sabbatical in Africa. This parish was located in a tiny, poor village where the scarcity of water, food, education and healthcare were commonplace for members of this community. Corky accompanied the village's parish priest to a family's home one evening for dinner. The house was like all other houses in the village –a three room hut with dirt floors and walls. As they entered the home Corky noticed that behind the hut was a small fenced in area with one, solitary chicken. When the meal was placed before them it contained the diet staple of rice and bread and a beautifully cooked chicken which the hosts were obviously quite proud of. Corky assumed the chicken he saw in the yard was now before him on his plate. Later as the two

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men were returning to the rectory, the priest told him that the chicken the parishioners served was the last chicken they would be eating for a long while. They had no money to buy such a luxury again. Corky became very upset at the African priest and asked him why he allowed this family to serve him their only chicken when they should have preserved it for a special occasion. The priest turned to Corky and said, Oh, sir, but it was the most special occasion. For, to host you in their home was to host our Savior himself. They wanted to serve you the best that they had, not being concerned with what they might not have tomorrow. Corky says he has thought back on that evening many times throughout his ministry, a ministry which for decades was shaped by his experience in Africa. He remembered what a gracious family they were and what a delightful evening it had been. He had been invited into much finer homes, eaten on much finer tables and been served much finer meals. But he couldn't recall those occasions. This particular evening, however, he would never forget. Out of this family's scarcity, he had received an abundance of grace.

The abundance of God's kingdom is not found by holding on tightly to what we already have or worrying about what we could lose tomorrow. It is not found in tallying every dime and penny, every jug of oil or chicken to ensure us a sense of security and freedom. It is not found in clinging to the false idols of earthly riches and success of which we Americans are ardent worshipers. The abundance is found in our willingness to risk giving up all that we have in order to place our whole selves and our whole lives before our God.

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True security and true freedom do not come from any savings accounts, but from trusting all that we are to a God who will be there for us tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that. May we have the audacity to live our lives believing that it is not by our own riches and resources we receive abundance, but by trusting in our God's most gracious goodness. Amen

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