

**PENTECOST 22B/LECTIONARY 32**

November 8, 2009

*Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ*

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I Kings 17:8-16

Psalm 146

Hebrews 9:24-28

***Mark 12:38-44***

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I'm sure what I'm about to say will shock some of you, and come as no surprise to others. I am a control freak.

Several years ago there came a time when I thought I had my controlling nature, well, UNDER CONTROL. I was really making progress in delegating responsibility, not having to be in charge of every little detail of every little thing, trusting that others would do what they said they would do.

Then, I boarded a plane to go to a friend's wedding. Every bit of my controlling nature came rushing back at once. You see, in addition to being a control freak, I'm also a nervous flyer.

I'm sure it's the control freak in me that makes me a nervous flyer. Nowhere does it become more apparent to me that I am so NOT in control than when I'm on an airplane. I'm at the mercy of the mechanics and hardware of the plane. I'm at the mercy of the skills and aptitudes of the pilot and co-pilot.

But one of the main reasons flying scares me is because I'm just not convinced that airplanes manage to stay in the air through aerodynamics. What I'm saying is – and I know this is totally irrational – those huge metallic things flying through the air seems like some sort of magic to me. I'm not saying I believe in magic; remember, I said this is irrational. But that irrational part of my brain keeps telling me that some day the pixie dust is going to wear off, and all of a sudden all the planes will suddenly fall from the sky. The age of air travel will be over when all the pixie dust is used up.

So that day, several years ago, I'm sitting on the tarmac at the airport, waiting for my plane to take off, and feeling very anxious. What's more, that was only the first of three scheduled plane rides that day, and a total of six planes for the whole trip. That happy thought upped my anxiety level even more.

Over the years I've tried any of a number of things – most of which I won't mention right now – to try to deal with my fear of flying. What I've finally settled on as the most healthy way to try to manage my fear is prayer. I say a free-form prayer as we're taxiing from the gate to the runway. And as the engines start to rev for take-off, I begin repeating, “Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit... Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit...”

But a strange thing happened to me that time. As I began repeating those words, I suddenly switched to repeating a line from Martin Luther's morning and evening prayers. It goes like this: "Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine." These words brought me greater comfort than my former mantra. These words reminded me that it is *all of me* that I was committing to God.

So what does this all have to do with anything? Why am I telling you this? I think it has everything to do with today's Gospel lesson about the poor widow and her offering to the treasury. There's something in this reading that our English translations of this passage miss. It was very important to me on that flight that day, and it's very important for us today.

Let's look at it. Please turn with me for a moment to the back page of your bulletin. Take a look at the last half of verse 44 of the Gospel lesson. Our New Revised Standard Version, the text printed in your bulletins, reads, "She out of her poverty has put in everything she had, *all she had to live on.*"

It is this last part I'd like us to focus on for a moment. Other translations, instead of saying, "all she had to live on,"<sup>1</sup> translate this as, "all that she had, [even] all her living,"<sup>2</sup> or, "all that she had, her whole livelihood,"<sup>3</sup> or even this paraphrase, "she gave up her last penny."<sup>4</sup> But the words being translated there are not "living" or "livelihood" – they are "her whole *LIFE*." She gave up *her whole life*.

When we read this text, no matter what translation, our reaction might be to say, "What a woman of faith!" But what part of faith does the poor widow display that we admire?

I think that the point that the Biblical author is trying to make is that the poor widow displayed her faith in God through trust. By putting even her last two coins into the treasury, this widow entrusted her *whole life* to God. We don't know what her motivation was. But, we could certainly guess that she didn't know where her next meal was coming from. When she put her last coins in the treasury, she was making a leap of faith. It is as if this woman was saying, "God, I leave the details up to you."

This story of the poor widow is the last of Jesus' public teachings in the Gospel of Mark. Is it possible that Jesus uses the example of the poor widow to foreshadow what he is about to do for the world? Is it possible that Jesus is saying, "See that poor widow giving her whole life up to God? Soon someone else will give up his whole life for the sake of all."

All of these thoughts were swirling through my head in the first few minutes of that flight. I was finally able to acknowledge that I was not in control, and that not being in control was the source of my fear. I found myself in a situation where I completely gave myself up to God's care. And then I understood what this text from Mark means when it says the poor widow gave up her whole life. She trusted God completely for all the things she needed simply to live.

I *finally* realized that I need not fear. Don't get me wrong here – I certainly don't see it anywhere in the Bible that God will protect me from all harm, or prevent the pixie dust from wearing off of whatever plane I happen to be in at that moment. But because Jesus gave all of himself for me, for all of us, I need not fear the moment of death. I know that because Jesus offered himself up, I have the forgiveness of sins and the hope of the resurrection. This hope frees me up to live with confidence.

Being able to trust in the promise of God freed me up to actually *enjoy* the rest of that flight, and the five others that came after it. There is no better platform for viewing the handiwork of God than from the window seat of an airplane cruising at 31,000 feet. This world really is an awesome sight.

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While on that flight, I was reminded of a bumper sticker I used to see often. It said, “God is my co-pilot.” Then there was another bumper sticker that came out in response to that one – it said, “If God is your co-pilot, get out of the driver’s seat.”

That’s the one that particularly speaks to the control freak in me. I like to think I’m in control. But then I’m suddenly reminded that God’s the one in control, and that I just need to trust that God will do what God has promised.

Maybe that’s the point of that journey I took. Maybe the point is that I need to trust God to do what God has promised. Only then can I appreciate the tremendous gift that’s been given to me. It’s a gift that once received, puts all of life back into its proper perspective. I need to stop worrying, and stop being a control freak. I need to let the only one who’s capable of being in the driver’s seat of my life be at the controls, not just when I’m flying, but all the time.

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In just a few minutes Anthony Kjell is going to receive that same gift, when God claims him as his own child for all eternity. That gift is forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ. It's a gift that Anthony's parents will accept in faith, trusting that God will be faithful to His promises when they place Anthony's whole life into God's hands. And because of that gift, Anthony's parents can rest assured that God will love and care for their precious child for all eternity.

Amen.

<1,472 words>

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<sup>1</sup> NRSV, NIV, NASV

<sup>2</sup> KJV, AKJV & ASV

<sup>3</sup> NKJV

<sup>4</sup> Living Bible