

BIBLE CHALLENGE November 2 - 8, 2015

INTRODUCTION

Widows are visible everywhere in this week's readings. Jesus denounces those scribes who pray impressive prayers but devour widows' houses. He commends the poor widow who in his view gave far more than the major donors. Jesus doesn't see her simply as an object of compassion or charity. She, like the widow of Zarephath who shares her last bit of food with Elijah, does something of great importance.

FIRST READING: 1 Kings 17:8-16

This chapter begins the story of Elijah. God sends a drought on Israel because of the sins of King Ahab. This passage depicts God's saving acts not only on behalf of Elijah, but also on behalf of those who are associated with the prophet, even a foreigner, the widow of Zarephath.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Kings 17

Explorer Challenge: 1 Kings 17 relates several incidents in Elijah's life; which of those incidents have close parallels with incidents in the life of Jesus?

PSALM: Psalm 146

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down. (Ps. 146:8)

Adventure Challenge: Compare the characteristics of God praised in Psalm 146 with those in Psalm 147 (also a praise Psalm but with a somewhat different focus.)

Explorer Challenge: Option A. Read a summary of the life of Elijah, then read Psalm 146 and identify parts of the Psalm that seem particularly appropriate to Elijah's experience.

Option B. Some of Psalm 146 reflects the historical and cultural conditions of the time. (Examples: "princes," "God of Jacob," "strangers.") To rewrite the Psalm for today, how might you change these phrases? What words and ideas in Psalm 146 do not need to be updated?

SECOND READING: Hebrews 9:24-28

The letter to the Hebrews describes Christ as a high priest who offers himself as a sacrifice for our sin. Christ does not die again and again each year. He died once, is alive with God, and will reveal himself on the last day.

Adventure Challenge: Hebrews 9.

Explorer Challenge: Hebrews 9 compares earthly sacrifices and sanctuaries with those in Heaven. Read Leviticus 16 to gain some context for what Paul understood as required for "earthly" atonement.

GOSPEL: Mark 12:38-44

After engaging in a series of public arguments with religious leaders in the temple, Jesus contrasts the proud and oppressive ways of those leaders with the sacrificial humility and poverty of the widow.

Adventure Challenge: Mark 12.

Explorer Challenge: Option A. Use a concordance or other reference to see how widows are presented in the Bible. Is Jesus' teaching typical or unusual?

Option B. How do the other stories or teachings in Mark 12 relate to the story of the widow's offering and her contrast with the religious elite?

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, you show forth your almighty power chiefly by reaching out to us in mercy. Grant us the fullness of your grace, strengthen our trust in your promises, and bring all the world to share in the treasures that come through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

The LORD raises up the poor from the dust, to make them inherit a seat of honor. (*1 Sam. 2:8*)