

Year B, November 11, 2018
25 Pentecost (Proper 27)
Christ Church, Mexia

In the gospel reading this morning, we heard again the story of the widow who gives all that she has, two coins worth about a penny, at the Temple. As with all scripture, there are many ways to interpret or talk about it. The primary emphasis often at this time of year is on stewardship of money, but I would like to take a slightly different direction this morning. I want to discuss commitment and focus. The widow trusted God to take care of her. She was essentially giving her life to God - or placing her life in God's hands, however you wish to think of it. She was giving her all - not holding anything back. She was living her faith - committed and focused.

Virginia LeBlanc, author of *Love the Skin You're In: How to Conquer Life Through Divergent Thinking*, puts it this way: "Life's course and the path I have walked has empowered me to be the strong, focused woman I am today. So many live their life unfulfilled or discontent, settling on the position that it's just the way things are and must be. When we approach life with that perspective, we live a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is not the way things have to be, whether they have always been that way or not. They are the way we choose to live. Wishing it to be so will do no good. You must make it happen, and life will not happen for you without action and effort." We have a choice and we must have commitment to and stay focused on what is important to have the courage to act.

Jim Elliott was quoted as saying: "Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God." Is that the way we live our lives?

Søren Kierkegaard exhorts us: "When you read God's Word, you must constantly be saying to yourself, 'It is talking to me, and about me.'" We cannot view the Bible as just a book about history, some great stories... If we are to truly live our lives in accordance with our faith, we must heed Kierkegaard's words.

And because this is also Veteran's Day, I would be remiss if I didn't include something from the Armed Forces today. In his book, *Hillbilly Elegy*, J.D. Vance shares a story about when he was at the U.S. Marine Corps boot camp. He had completed a three-mile run and was mildly impressed with his accomplishment and his 25-minute time. But a

senior drill instructor viewed it differently. The DI screamed at him: "If you're not puking, you're lazy! Stop being (expletive deleted) lazy." He then ordered Vance to sprint between him and a tree until Vance was almost ready to pass out. Vance was heaving, barely able to catch his breath. "That's how you should feel at the end of every run!" the DI yelled. Vance observed, "In the Marines, giving it your all was a way of life." Well, this may be an extreme example, but it makes a point.

One last story... According to Charles Swindoll, "It's tough to live a focused life. From every direction, something or someone clamors for our attention. A distraction draws our eyes and the next thing we know, we've swerved off the road and headed down another detour.

One Chicago youth pastor came up with a clever way to keep his group on track. Concerned that the balmy beaches of Florida – the site of their upcoming evangelism track – would lure the teens from their purpose, he fashioned a cross from two pieces of lumber. Just before they climbed on the bus, he showed it to the group.

'I want all of you to remember that the whole purpose of our going is to glorify the name of Christ, to lift up the cross – the message of the Cross, the emphasis of the Cross, the Christ of the Cross,' he announced. 'So we're going to take this cross wherever we go.'

The teenagers looked at one another, a little unsure of his plan. But they agreed to do it. ... It went with them into restaurants. It stayed overnight where they stayed overnight. It stood in the sand while they ministered on the beach.

At first, lugging the cross around embarrassed the kids. But later, it became a point of identification. That cross was a constant, silent reminder of who they were and why they had come. They eventually regarded carrying it as an honor and a privilege.

The night before they went home, the youth leader handed out two nails to each of the kids. He told them that if they wanted to commit themselves to what the cross stood for, they could hammer one nail into it and keep the other with them. One by one the teens drove their nail into the cross.

About fifteen years later, one fellow – now a stockbroker – called the youth leader. He told him that he still keeps the nail with him in his desk drawer. Whenever he loses his sense of focus, he looks at the nail and remembers the cross on that beach in Florida. It reminds him of what is at the core of his life..."

So, I ask you this morning to keep the picture of the widow giving her all with you as you go through this week, this month, the coming year

and beyond. Let it be a guide to your life and faith – like the nail in the previous story. Let it be an inspiration to you. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer so eloquently said, “Being Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God’s will.”

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.
Amen.