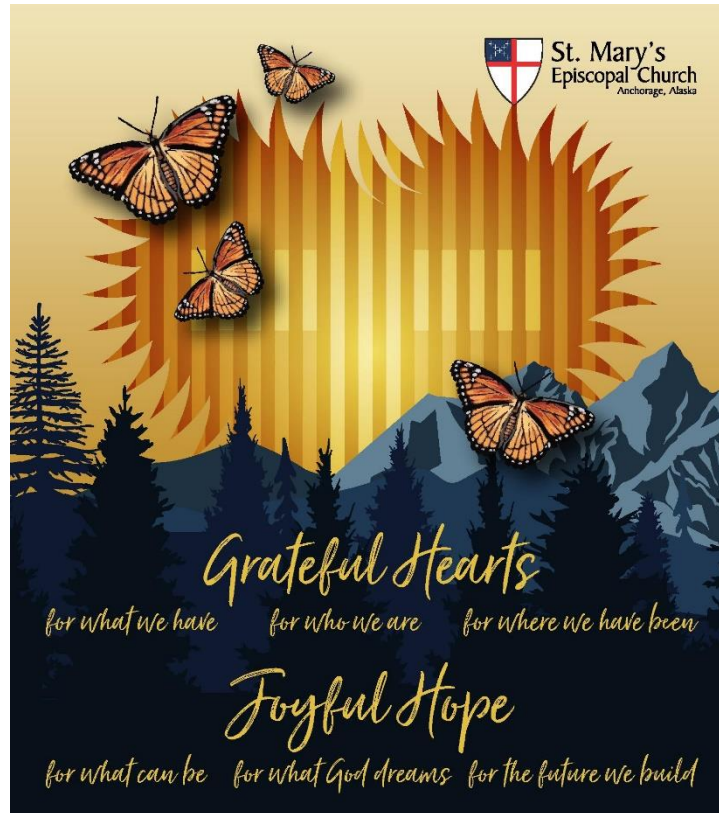


Grateful Hearts; Joyful Hope

A Sermon by Rev. Dawn Allen-Herron,
With the People of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage
Sunday, November 7, 2021

Scriptures: Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17; Mark 12:38-44



We give with grateful hearts,
(grateful for what we have, for who we are, and for where we have been)
in joyful hope.
(hope for what can be, for what God dreams, and for the future we build)

Rather than be coy, I'll share up front something that many of you could have guessed. This is the time of year that we focus, as a congregation, on planning next year's budget, and as a part of that, we have a "stewardship campaign."

The truth is that we are *always* concerned about begin faithful stewards of what God has given us-- but like everything important to us, we set aside a time to think about it in a more concentrated way. The logo for this year's stewardship campaign is above.

In its short form, the campaign is centered around “Grateful Hearts; Joyful Hope.”

We are grateful

- For what we have
- For who we are
- For where we have been

We live (and give) in joyful hope

- For what can be
- For what God dreams
- For the future we can build

It is in this context that I read today’s Gospel Story.

It is a story that I have heard, and loved, since I was bringing my own 2 pennies to church, to put into the offering plate.

The first sermon that I wrote for this morning focused on the woman whom Jesus praised.

I planned to preach it as it had been taught to me:

See this generous woman, who gave all that she had!

Look at her grateful heart...grateful, even in her poverty!

Observe her joyful hope...giving to the Temple’s treasury, though it left her with nothing!

And then 2 things happened on the same day:

1. Heard an interview with Bryan Stevenson, of *Just Mercy*.

HOPE is our super-power. Hope dares to believe that the world can be different.

Hope dares to believe that WE can be different, that we can live together in a different way.

2. I remembered a visit with Pat, a saint at another Church I served. We watched a Seattle Mariner’s game, as usual; she made her favorite dinner for me-- 1 flour tortilla + 1 handful of grated cheddar cheese, microwaved for 1 minute. She brought my dinner to me; then as she returned to her place in front of the game, she stumbled.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I’ve been a bit dizzy recently.”

I asked, of course, if she had discussed this with her doctor. She had not.

“Well...I have been taking half doses of one of my medications, so that I can pay my pledge to the Church. I guess I'm like the widow with her 2 pennies. I don't have much to give, but I can give.”

My dear friends, whatever else you hear us say during this stewardship campaign,

be certain that we are NOT hoping that anyone will jeopardize their health, safety, and well-being in order to support the Church. Just no.

But that causes a problem with the way that I had heard and been taught this story.

So...back to the text.

First, it's freeing to notice that Jesus did not praise the woman. Rather, he *noticed* her. He points her out to the disciples.

Second, the context matters (as always).

- As we read last week, a teacher of the law asks “Which is the greatest commandment?”
 - Love God; love neighbor...
- Then, teaching, Jesus says, “Beware of teachers of the law, who....devour widows' houses...”

Which causes us to wonder--why was she poor?

We don't know all of the reasons, but Jesus seems to indicate that part of the reason, likely, was the oppressive system of obligations placed on people by the Temple officials who had joined with the Roman Empire.

I had been taught that this woman was to be admired because quietly gave 2 pennies WITHOUT giving her 2 cents' worth, then leaves without making a fuss.

But there is something wrong with this narrative.

Perhaps she was grateful. Perhaps she was hopeful.

But perhaps she was simply coerced by teachers of the law. And Jesus noticed.

And so I wonder.

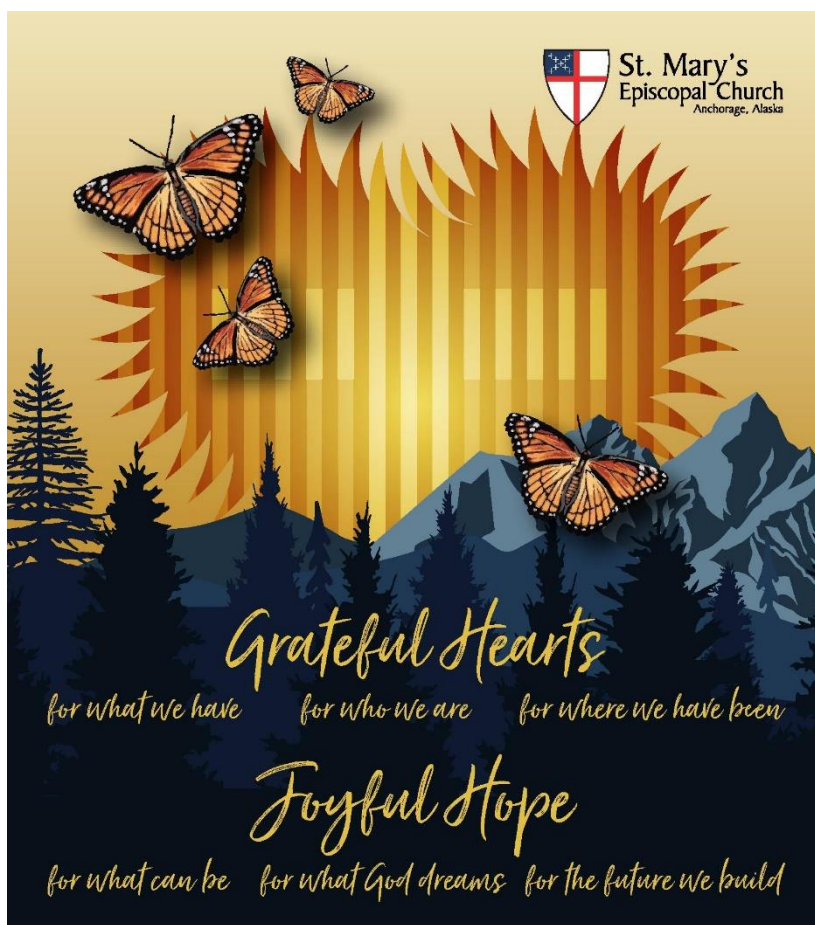
I wonder if the place of HOPE in this story is in the disciples (which includes US)--

Those who observe, who notice, injustice
And dare to believe that the world can be different.

I'll tell you a secret.
It's pretty easy for me to notice what is wrong with the world.
Social media has figured out my algorithms, and makes sure that I see plenty more.
And it's easy for all of this noticing to generate ANGER and DESPAIR, more than HOPE.
I don't need another community of folk to help me point out what is wrong.

I desperately need the Church. I desperately need YOU.
I need our Story, over and over--Sunday after Sunday.
I need to lament what is, *and* believe what can be.
I need to hear the Story, over and over again
Of returning no one evil for evil,
Of love that is only complete in justice
Of Beloved Community
Of creation well-stewarded
Of Grace enough for our failures,
And Food and Love for every. Single. One of us.

In this season of giving thanks,
Of living with grateful hearts,
Let us also live in joyful hope,
Daring to believe what can be,
Daring to hold onto God's dreams,
And daring to build that future.



We give with grateful hearts,

(grateful for what we have, for who we are, and for where we have been)

in joyful hope.

(hope for what can be, for what God dreams, and for the future we build)

May it be so. Amen.