

I Kings 17:8-16

Then the word of the LORD came to him (Elijah): ⁹“Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.” ¹⁰ So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” ¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.” ¹² “As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.” ¹³ Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.’” ¹⁵ She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. ¹⁶ For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

Mark 12:38-44

As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰ They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.” ⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, ^[i] worth only a fraction of a penny. ^[k]

⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

Imagine for a minute that you are Jewish woman living in the first Century. Married at a young age to a man who was supposed to care for you your entire life, your husband dies and you suddenly find yourself without a means of support. Without a family to support you, without children who are grown and taking care of you, you find yourself praying every day for God to provide. Living on the edges of society, trying to survive, you would most often trade your labor in the fields for simply a meal and a secure place to sleep. Coins would be hard for you to come by and would be precious safeguard for the days when you could find no work. A few fractions of a penny could buy some bread from some generous person in order to keep you alive. Yet, you still view yourself as a faithful Jewish woman. You want to give your tribute to the temple, just like you did in the days when you had a husband, when times were so much better, the days when you were not worried that you wouldn't eat tomorrow. --You are torn with what to do. You hang back and watch the rich folks pouring their bulging purses slowly and dramatically into the temple coffers. Their smiles are huge with each clanging coin that announces their prominence and their generosity to their neighbors. When there seems to be a lull in the parade of the showmen, you hesitantly make your way up to box. The two small coins seem so tiny in your hand, each no wider than the length of

a grain of wheat. These lepton coins had no assigned monetary value of their own, they were simply weighed alongside other coins in order to increase the total weight. You look at them longingly one last time as you tip your hand and they slide off your palm to land almost silently in the pile below. Immediately they are lost among the larger coins. No one seems to notice or to even thank you for your gift as the priests did for the larger presents. You make your way out of the temple courtyard, proud that you were able to contribute everything that you had and completely trusting in God to provide for what tomorrow would bring. You were secure in the knowledge that whether you lived or died, that you belonged to the Lord.

Today, November 11th is Veteran's day, the day that we remember and honor the lives of those who died in service to our country. It is perhaps fitting that very shortly after the always divisive national election day of the first Tuesday of November that the annual celebration of Veterans day, always on November 11th should follow shortly thereafter. Today is the day when we remember that while some people came home from the battle front, there are many who gave the ultimate sacrifice and gave their very lives trying to protect and trying to serve their country.

While we have many veterans who have come from the Allegan area, today, I would like to tell you the story of one young man from Allegan. His name is John Benedict Nahan, III. John was born June 20th, 1945; in Morehead City North Carolina. He was first child of John and Evoline Nahan. This Catholic family moved to Allegan in late 1956 and John and his 12 younger siblings grew up on the shores of Miner Lake in Allegan. After John graduated from Grand Rapids Catholic High School he went to study geological engineering at Michigan Tech, then like so many of the young men of his day in 1965 he enlisted in the Marine Corps. John became a rifleman, a lance corporal with the United States Marine Corps. In July of 1966, he was sent to Viet Nam. And after his required year of service there, he volunteered to extend his stay an additional three months.

In early August, 1967, a nine man team from A Company, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division began a night reconnaissance patrol in the A Chau Valley in Thua Thien Province, South Vietnam. The motto of their division was “Celer –Silens-Mortalis” or “Swift, Silent and Deadly” and they were trained specifically for reconnaissance in order to find out more about where the enemy was and what they were doing. John served as their radioman. Unfortunately the Marines were

spotted by a local woman and her child who alerted a nearby North Vietnamese unit. The North Vietnamese slowly and carefully surrounded 3rd Recon Battalion and another Patrol that had joined with it. Seeing that they were surrounded, the marines bided their time and waited for two days, trapped by the North Vietnamese. On the third day, August 3rd, 1967; two helicopters arrived to rescue the trapped Marines. Some of the patrol men, including John Nahan loaded aboard the first helicopter, and the helicopter began to take off. But the North Vietnamese were ready and waiting. As his helicopter began to lift off the ground, the North Vietnamese launched a rocket propelled grenade inside the helicopter and the helicopter crashed. The pilot was killed by small arms fire, and some of the passengers died in the crash or in the subsequent hostile fire from the North Vietnamese. Five of John's wounded teammates made it out of the destroyed helicopter and onto the second helicopter. But on August 3rd, 1967, John Nahan was listed as Killed in Action, Body Not Recovered. John Benedict Nahan III was only 22 years old.

For the next 27 years, what became of John's remains was a mystery. Then in 1994, the Joint Task Force Full Accounting unit were able to excavate the site. Some remains of some soldiers were returned to the United States to a lab in Hawaii. After some painstaking laboratory

work, finally in July of 2001, those remains were identified as being of Lance Corporal John Nahan III. His remains were then returned to Allegan and on August 18th 2001 he was buried at Sacred Heart Cemetery on 20th street in Allegan with full military honors.

In November in churches everywhere, it is typically time for stewardship campaigns. In congregations in Allegan and beyond, pledge cards are being sent out, and charts which handily calculate percentages of your income are being published in church newsletters and in mailings everywhere. Last year, our congregation had an organized stewardship campaign. We heard a stewardship sermon and stewardship testimonies, we had bulletin inserts and a newsletter article and we encouraged everyone to give of their time, their talents and their treasure. But the message of our passage today is not to simply give back to God a little bit out of your great wealth, that is in fact not seen as being very faithful.

The message of our passage today is to give God EVERYTHING. Just like that widow who dropped those tiny little coins into the offering, just like John Nahan who willingly gave his life in service to his country; you are being asked to give over your very life to God.

It is a radical thing, this being a disciple of Jesus. Both John Nahan and the Widow in our passage today both understood that living for what

you believe in isn't something that is done casually. It is something that costs you everything. The strength of a service man or woman and the strength of the widow in our passage, their might is that they are willing to give up everything for what they believe in. It isn't just being a Christian when you feel like it, or giving what you calculate is left over after you budget for all of your monthly expenses. Being a follower of Jesus means risking all that you have and all that you are for God. It demands nothing more than your life, all of your time, talents and treasure. Everything that you do, and all that you have as a Christian needs to be done for the glory of God, and for the furthering of the message of God's love and hope to the world. Jesus doesn't ask us simply for our "extra time" or our "extra money" or our "extra skills". Jesus asks for all us, for our whole being, all of who we are to follow him –even to death on a cross.

May each of us be willing to pay such a price, and have the strength and the might to give to God all that we are as we enact God's love to the world. Amen.