

## GOD'S LIGHT SHINES IN THE LOW POINTS

Once upon a time, "sticker shock" was a car shopper's response to the unexpectedly high price listed on the window sticker of a new vehicle. Now, even a carton of eggs elicits sticker shock. We all know the feeling. So, we forego some items at the grocery store, and make other budget adjustments.

This can be unpleasant, or somewhat painful; but it is not altogether a bad thing. In tight times, reassessing how we spend our money helps us to distinguish wants from needs, and to realize that we can do just fine with less. This can lead us toward a simpler way of life, and can help us enjoy what we have, with genuine gratitude.

But while we may all feel some degree of financial pinch, many strain to afford even the basics. This is not a modern predicament. We see it taking place around 875 BC, in the story of the unnamed widow of Zarephath in the Bible's Old Testament (1 Kings 17).

In biblical times, widows without family support often became destitute for lack of a social safety net, and apparently the widow of Zarephath was one of those. Yet, at her lowest point, God displayed his glory and compassion.

He commands her to feed a stranger, the prophet Elijah. She tells Elijah, "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." It looks like the end for her, and for her son; but even so, she trusts in the Lord with all her heart (Proverbs 3:5).

Elijah reassures her, "Don't be afraid." He tells her to use her last bit of flour and oil to make bread for him, with a promise that "the jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry... ." With courageous faith, she does it.

And miraculously, her flour and oil did not run out, because even in her most dire straits she trusted God and obeyed his exacting request. She gave freely to another, not just what she could spare, but everything she had. At her low point, by faith, God's light shone in the darkness.

Jesus also noticed this kind of sacrificial generosity as He observed the freewill offering box at the Temple one day. He saw that while "many rich people put in large sums...a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny." He explained to his disciples, "this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had to live on" (Mark 12:41-44). By her faith, God's light shone in the darkness.

Lent is a good time to reflect on these stories, and to consider our own giving. Yes, times are tight, yet few of us are down to our last crust of bread or penny like those two widows. Have we neglected sharing with others lately in order to cover ourselves? Are we sharing only what we won't miss? Or are we trusting in God and

sharing sacrificially with "the least of these" as with Him (Matthew 25:40)?

Jesus often taught about caring for the poor, including widows and orphans, so it has been a focus of his church ever since. Let's notice the needs of our neighbors and do something to meet them, even as we stretch to meet our own, that God's light might shine in the darkness (Matthew 5:16).

As Elijah said, "Don't be afraid." Because, after all, "All things come from you, O Lord, and of your own have we given you...it comes from your hand and all of it belongs to you" (1 Chronicles 29:14).

With love in the Lord,  
The Rev. Christine Maddux