

Chapter 6: The Widow of the 2 Kings

Theme

Sustain

Centering Practice

This session's centering moment includes a prayer by Hildegard of Bingen, a German Benedictine Abbess (or nun) who lived from 1098-1179. She may be one of the most accomplished women who ever lived: theologian, preacher, abbess, scientist, physician and healer, writer and composer.

Let's allow our minds to settle and to let go of all the busy-ness of our day. Find a comfortable place with feet flat on the floor. Close your eyes. Take in a deep breath from the bottom of your feet to the top of your head. Exhaling from the top of your head, through the body, back down into your feet and let the breath flow deep into the ground beneath you. Feel yourself become more grounded as you let go of the stuff you brought with you here into this circle. Now find your natural breath. Sit with this breath and allow it to bring you into the present moment. As you watch each exhalation and each inhalation let it bring you deeper into this community, and into the presence of God. (*Sit in silence for a few moments.*)

Prayer (Adapted from the prayer by Hildegard of Bingen, *Holy Spirit Comforting Fire*)

Holy Spirit,
Comforting fire,
Life of all creation,
Anointing the sick, cleansing body and soul,
Fill this body!

Holy Spirit,
Sacred breath, Fire of love,
Sweetest taste, Beautiful Aroma,
Fill this heart!

Holy Spirit,
Filling the world,
from the heights to the deep,
Raining from clouds, filling rivers and sea,
Fill this mind!

Holy Spirit,
Forgiving and giving,
uniting strangers, comforting widows,
Seeking the lost, and enfolding us together,
Fill these gathered here!

Holy Spirit,
Bringing light into dark places, igniting praise,
Greatest gift, our Hope and Encourager,
Holy Spirit of Christ,
I praise you!

Amen.

The Widow's Story

In the prior sessions, we learned about Hagar; women who strategically planned to save the Hebrew babies, among them Moses; and the sorrows and strength of Rachel. Tonight, we visit with one of the many women whose story is told in the Bible, but she remains nameless.

Let's pause for moment and reflect on names and what that means to us. Last session we shared in small groups about our names and the power of being named and having a name. The significance of having a name identifies you, but also gives you a reference point in time, much as we just discussed about Hildegard of Bingen. In the Bible and Apocrypha, there are more than 600 unnamed women*. And sadly, in the Bible, women are often referred not by name, but by their status in life, their relationships to men, and intentionally or unintentionally told they are not enough or known only as a single story.

"When we name someone or something, we are purposefully creating meaning in our lives. We name what is precious to us: our children, our pets, and sometimes even our possessions like cars. Names signify importance, belonging, and identity." (Women Rise Up, p.39)

Tonight's Bible reading brings us to Chapter 6 of the book and story of "The Widow of Second Kings" or as some Biblical scholars also title it, "The Widow and the Jar of Oil." The story hinges around the prophet Elisha who was named in the story and the dilemma of the widow with no husband, left in debt and now in danger of her two sons being sold into slavery to pay off her debts. Josephus, a historian of this time who wrote extensively about the Hebrew people, reports that the woman is likely the widow of Obadiah, the Lord High Chamberlain of Ahab, or as scripture states in verse one, "a member of the company of prophets." While her husband lived, she breathed the atmosphere of a court, and was nourished in the lap of luxury. But when he died, she seems to have been reduced to the poverty known by widowed women of the time. That world which had smiled upon her in the days of her prosperity, now turned its back upon her. Her friends forsook her and did not help her to any great degree. She was plunged into debt, contracted in order to obtain the barest necessities of life. Having nothing of any value left in the house, the hard-hearted creditor, in lieu of payment, threatened to take and sell her only two sons as slaves, which, by virtue of Jewish law he had the power to do. But the woman, the widow, was determined not to have this happen.

Maybe as you read this scripture and the chapter in the book, you found out that there seemed to be more to the widow than her just her poverty and threat of servitude but that she had positive attributes and traits that tell a lot about her. As the scripture is read, listen carefully and use your paper or journal to write down a few words or phrases that might lead you to think about who this widow really was. We will read the passage through twice in Lectio Divina style. The first time you will hear the story from the New Revised Standard Version.

2 Kings 4:1-7 (NRSV)

Pause sit with these words for a moment. Now **think of yourself as that woman**, the Widow and as you listen to this next reading of the scripture through the lens of this being YOU, hear the words again this time in The Message version.

2 Kings 4:1-7 (The Message)

From this passage and from chapter 6 in Katey's book, we learn about the character of the widow and what traits and actions led her to eventually succeed. It also brings us into the scripture by imaging what it would be like to be her.

Breakout Session/Small Group Discussion

Question for discussion: What attributes, talents, circumstances that helped the Widow? What were some circumstances that did NOT help her? How do you see yourself in this story?

Reporting Out

Have the groups report on their small group discussion as time allows.

Social Issue

Throughout this chapter, Katey uses the theme of “sustain.” She reflects on the widow’s story and on the stories of many courageous women today who live as widows and single mothers, sustaining themselves and their families.

“In so many ways this story [2 Kings 4:1-7] represents the millions of women today living as widows and single mothers, many of them in dire poverty. What they need is not merely a handout, though that would be a start. What they really need is the opportunity to be financially self-sufficient by having access to adequate resources.” (*Women Rise Up*, p. 123)

Video of Bolivian Women from United Methodist Women:
(<https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/news/knitting-a-better-future>)

Discuss video

Closing

The Blessing by Jan Richardson (*In the Sanctuary of Women*)

May you know
The way of life
That God has made for you.

May you find
The sustenance that comes
in traveling its paths

May you have
good company
to inspire and to guide you
and the graces
That come in going
Where only you can go.

This session was created by Marcia Florkey.