

2024 Proper 27B

Every now and then, when this life as a priest just feels like it's too much, I whine, "I could have been a plumber!" Just stick my head under someone's sink and work on a problem that can be fixed.

As I shared earlier this week, this has been one of those weeks when I have been confronted with a challenge that feels too big, too unfixable. The whole system—sometimes even the whole world—seems broken beyond repair.

Then I sat and meditated on these readings we just heard.

And I realized, Jesus had days like that, too.

How many of us have heard this widow in the Temple held up as a beautiful example of sacrificial giving? A model we should all follow?

Yeah. That's not what's going on here.

Jesus points her out because he is frustrated and angry with the entire Temple system. If it were working properly, that poor widow wouldn't be putting in her last two coins as the scribes sweep by in their long robes, oblivious to her presence.

No, if things were as they should have been, those scribes would be a little less ornately dressed and a lot more involved in her well-being. The Temple wouldn't be taking her money, they would be giving her more. Enough to provide for her needs. She wouldn't be invisible to them; she would be their entire focus.

Do you know how much money was spent on advertising this past election cycle? Billions. BILLIONS—with a B. and that was just the TV ads. How much paper was wasted printing those flyers which most of us didn't even look at? How much of our energy did we waste discussing people who would walk past us on the street, never even noticing if we were in need?

The whole system is broken.

I'm sure I'm not alone in thinking that the outcome of this election did not please God.

But here's the truth: I don't think God would have been particularly pleased if it had gone the other way, either.

Because while we were all focused on the big flashy lights and noise and drama, the widows and orphans, the poor and the sick and the marginalized and the oppressed were suffering. Bombs were falling on innocent people. Children were dying of curable diseases. Creation was screaming out for our attention and help.

And we looked away.

I know, I know...ideally, the people we elect will help address all those issues. Ideally.

Ideally.

But here's the hard truth. We are all far too interested in functioning as a worldly empire to ever get close to realizing the true kingdom of God.

Kingdom values are rooted in the love of God which spills into loving our neighbor—and realizing that every person on the planet is our neighbor. Not just the person who looks or acts or thinks or votes like me.

Remember, Jesus extended the definition of “neighbor” to the stranger. He even said—to the dismay of those who heard him—that we are to love our enemy.

When we realize that every person is our neighbor, we realize that there is no “our” side or “their” side. There is only *God's* side.

Okay, I'm getting a little intense here, so I want to step back and make my point in a lighter way.

There's a cartoon that illustrates what I'm talking about. In the top half of the panel, a football player is in the end zone, rejoicing at having just made the winning point, and he says, “This touchdown is for you, Jesus!”

And in the bottom half, Jesus is watching hockey.

We need the humility to recognize that both sides may be playing a game that is of no interest to God.

I want to finish by reading to you a prayer that came from Illustrated Ministry, which has helped me focus my prayers and energy on aligning myself with kingdom values.

Living and loving God,
you know what we have been through this week.
You know our frayed nerves and anxious stomachs.
You know that, even though Election Day is over,
our ministry continues.

We ask for your Spirit to bless us
with good courage to speak the truth,
to put service over self,
and to remember that we worship you
and you alone.

Do not let us stray from you.
Let us be like trees planted beside living water.
Let us remain rooted in your love.
Let us bear fruit and not be anxious.

We ask you to let Christ's light shine
in our community,
in this country,
and in the world you have made.

Let peace reign.
Let justice roll down.
Let there be a table set
for those who do not have enough to eat.
Let Christ the healer touch those who are ailing.
Let the Spirit's wisdom guide
those making consequential decisions.

Remind us, Holy God, that we are human.
On our own, we cannot fix all that is broken.
We cannot heal all who are in need.
Yet we can be part of the change
we wish to see in the world.
We can act with intention.
We can respond in love.
We can advocate for change
that serves the common good.
We can trust in you, Lord.
We can lift our prayers to you.

God, you have led your people in the past:
out of slavery,
through the wilderness,
and into beloved community.

Lead us once again through the unknowns ahead,
through the challenges yet to come,
toward a time when your promises of new life
begin to appear all around us.

This we pray,
as we always do and as we always will,
in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.