

1 Kings 17:8-16, Mark 12:38-44

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Evie Macway

October 16, 2022

Hokey-Pokey Living - That's What It's All About

I think I may have mentioned before that I have a thing about sermon titles. Sometimes they just are. They are just straightforwardly self explanatory. Sometimes though, when I can, I like to make them curious and intriguing so that when you read them you say, 'what could she be thinking?' Or, 'I wonder where this could lead?' So that when you contemplate the sermon on Sunday afternoon, if you do contemplate sermons on Sunday afternoons, the title really brings it back for you, or even better, it takes you beyond the sermon in your own thinking and your walk of faith. This is one of those titles I hope.

The first title that came to mind for me with our readings for this morning was 'All In'. That feels a little over used though. However, when you hear me say 'all in' and then look at the title I did choose, you may have already figured out where I am going with this.

When I was a child growing up on Napa I used to love to roller skating at the local skating rink. Our church would occasionally take over the rink for an all church skating party. Those were the best.

One of the games the rink would always lead us in during the parties was a round of Hokey-Pokey. Remember that little song and the dance that went with it? *You put your right hand in. You put your right hand out. Put your right hand in and you shake it all about.* The song then progresses down our bodies. You put left hand in. Then it is your right foot and your left foot. Then your right and left hip. Then your head. Until finally you put your whole self in. And you put your whole self out. You put your whole self in and you shake it all about. I have been having fun lately doing this game with our grandchildren.

Doing all of this on roller skates though took the whole thing up a notch, as we shook and moved and at the same time tried to maintain our balance, not landing on our bottoms on the rink floor when we went 'all in'.

My memories of the hokey pokey brought some new life to this idea of ‘all in’ for me this week, hence the sermon title.

I believe my days of a literal hokey pokey on roller skates are long over, but I would venture to say that our texts for this morning would suggest we keep putting our whole selves in when it comes to the rest of our lives.

This morning we have two stories of women who, according to their stories, put their whole selves in in response to what they heard God calling them to do. Alice read of the woman who, when God’s prophet, Elijah asked her for bread, told him she had none and in fact she and her son were near to starving. Through the words of Elijah the woman remembered her faith and out of that faith she did all that she could. She put her whole self in.

The story from Mark is similar in some ways, the woman with her two copper coins, but it brings to light some complicating factors, that are probably uncomfortably familiar to us. Putting our whole selves in is often not a smooth ride.

Here in Mark, Jesus is teaching. There are two brief lessons here, linked for us by the gospel writer. First, Mark writes, ‘As Jesus taught he said...’ and we have a concise lesson on pride and the unjust use of power. Jesus is talking about the scribes but we can insert ourselves.

I cringe when I hear these words, recalling the times when I have been too proud, and have put distance, in its many forms, between myself and those who have so much less. Where do my practices contribute to the suffering of others? When am I busy taking what I think I deserve at the expense of some one else? The lesson here about pride, humility, and injustice and how those three can intertwine to produce suffering are clear. Also clear is the truth that this is not the way of Jesus. “They will receive the greater condemnation.”

But as Mark tells the story, there is more to this lesson. In a sense Jesus is showing us the appropriate alternative to the scribes. Don’t do this. Do this instead.

Now Jesus sits down and does some people watching. People are coming to make their offerings at the temple. They are paying their pledges to church. Most likely in Jesus’ time and culture this was pretty much a requirement, not an option. You needed to show up in that line and you needed to put something in that pot.

Jesus is sitting and watching. Those who have a lot give a lot. So far so good. That makes sense. Then a poor widow comes along and gives just a bit. Jesus, we know from Mark, is good at seeing below the surface. He sees the heart, where the actions on the outside come from. He saw it in the scribes and he sees it in this widow.

He makes an observation. “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those others who are contributing to the treasury. For they have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had.” She put her whole self in.

And it is like a picture suddenly comes into focus here. It is not about the amount of money or from Jesus’ lesson about the scribes, the amount of honor or where one sits at the table or how long are our prayers. It is all about the heart.

Do the things that we do, the choices we make reflect our love and care for one another and our trust in God? It is that simple. It is also that difficult. Because as much as we may want to trust in God, trusting can feel like we are doing the hokey pokey on roller skates. It is a tall order to put your whole self in.

This is why I like our stewardship theme for this year so much, “Called to Care’, caring for our church family and community.’ Fortunately and appropriately, we do not make a public show of how much each one of us gives, but there is truth in this passage for us.

It is not really about how much we put in the pot. This time of year, of course, when we are asking our Session to come up with a budget for how we will make sure the ministry and mission we do here at Stone Church continues, we all know that putting money in the pot is important because some of those ministries and missions we do require dollars and cents. But the question this text raises is about motivation. What is our motivation for the choices we make, about money, about time, about our power, about any of the gifts God gives to us? What do we see when we look at why we do what we do? Is our motivation our love for God and God’s creation, our trust that God is leading us?

This is where the caring our stewardship committee is lifting up comes in. Jesus did not tell these stories because the people around him had it all figured out. Far from it. He told them to push people, then and now, to remember that faithful living is about having our whole selves, our whole lives, focused on God’s love and care for us and for the world.

How do we do that? By sharing our lives in ministry and prayer. By listening for the Holy Spirit in the conversations we share with one another. By opening our hearts and minds to the word of God, the love of God, the call of God in the choices we are called to make and the relationships we share. By letting God and God's love be our motivation.

By seeing the gifts in others and in ourselves, and encouraging *and challenging* one another in the gifts we have to share. And then supporting one another when putting our whole selves in makes us feel like we might topple and fall.

Stone Church is a caring community, motivated by God's love for all people. It is exciting to think about where your caring will take you as a congregation in the year ahead. Sustaining and strengthening the ministries you have. Possibly new ministries with new pastoral leadership. Caring for people and places God has not even shown you yet.

These texts about the two women who gave so much of who they are and what they had are challenging because they remind us how easy it is to skim the surface of faithful living. To put maybe just a hand in or a foot, and not our whole selves. Because whole self, genuine faithful living is scary. This stewardship season and always, may we all continue caring and sharing ourselves, our whole selves. Because really, that *is* what it's all about.