

There are many highways in Canada that honour our fallen soldiers. Here in Ontario there is a section of the 401 called the Highway of Heroes. 133 fallen soldiers have travelled this highway from Trenton to Toronto over the last several years.

I watched the repatriation on television many times but actually seeing it is something I will never forget. After a day of shopping in Toronto, my daughter and I were travelling eastward toward Oshawa when we began to notice something strange on the 401. Traffic was moving along quite nicely in our lanes but in the opposite lanes we noticed the traffic seemed to be thinning out. As we approached the section of highway called the Highway of Heroes, we began to see crowds assembled on the overpasses. People lined the highway, flags waving in the breeze, and more flags draped over the sides of the over pass. Cars on our side slowed down and eventually stopped. As we sat there waiting for the traffic to move, we saw them coming on the other side of the highway. One, two, three, four, five, six hearses carrying the bodies of the latest victims of war. Long, black shiny cars with their flags fluttering in the breeze passed quickly. As each hearse passed, people stood at attention, some saluted and more waving their flags. Firemen, ambulances, police and people like you and me all paying respects to the soldiers and families in those cars. Inside our car we sat and watched as each passed; the only audible sound within the car was the sobbing of the passengers.

These brave young men gave their lives for the love of their fellow men and their concern of others.

In today's message we hear of the widow who gave all she had and I thought of the soldiers who gave all they had. Mark 12:38-44 calls us to focus on the behaviour and actions of the scribes and the offering given by the widow. Jesus talks about the scribes walking in the marketplace dressed in long robes demanding respect of those around them. The scribes also had reserved seating in the Synagogue and the best places in the feasts. These same scribes took advantage of the widows and then prayed to God in great length and depth.

Jesus watched as both the wealthy and the poor widow give their offerings. We learn about the poor widow who gave her last two coins to the Temple treasury. Jesus compared the actions of the widow who gave everything she had to live on – two simple coins – to the actions of the wealthy who gave a substantial sum yet caused them no hardship.

When Jesus talks about the scribes, not all are included in his criticisms; only those wayward scribes who crave power and authority.

Jesus does not “paint them all with the same brush” so to speak.

He points out that there are some scribes who go beyond their entrusted authority. The scribes were prominent people in the ancient world and held very important

positions. In addition to their work as translators, they taught the laws that were passed down from God through Moses to the people. God's law stated that the widows and the needy of society were to be taken care of by the people of their community (Deut.14:29). Jesus consistently expresses God's displeasure to those who neglect or oppose this law. But these scribes, with their elitist attitudes wanted to be the centre of attention, have positions of prominence no matter where they went, and always showed their superior attitude.

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Jesus was annoyed with the scribes who were hypocritical to their position; the ones who took the property, personal belongings, and houses owned by the widows and the needy in society. But these scribes, who know the law the best, were the same ones who "rob them of their homes" (v40) taking away from those who needed help the most. Jesus could see these wayward scribes had distanced themselves from God and God's Kingdom yet at the same time preached God's Word.

Jesus watches as the offerings are presented at the Temple and points out to the disciples that the wealthy give their excess, what they didn't need. The widow, who gave everything she had, her last two coins, gave out of her true faith and trust in God. This widow had no one to provide for her "She out of her poverty has put in everything she had."(v44). Jesus praises her faith, a faith which surpasses many religious leaders that he sees in the marketplace. Her faith and trust in God is in

alignment with the trust Jesus himself has in God. The widow gave all she had to the Temple treasury even though this is the place that Jesus says is corrupt and condemned in an earlier chapter of Mark (11:15).

When we look around us in our society, in our work places and even in our churches, do we see such corruption? How many among us today are like these wayward scribes? Who among us seeks power and prestige and will go to any lengths to achieve it? Do you know people like those scribes who strut around the market place with their robes of self importance?

Jesus tells us not to get caught up in our desire for power, materialism or prestige. Jesus criticizes those who hunger for these things. God commanded that widows and the needy be protected in society; those who disregard this law are actually breaking God's law and are not looked upon favourably in the eyes of God. Like Jesus the widow is a true example of the love, faith, and Christian living.

Today we honor Remembrance Day, a day set aside to remember the men and women who gave their lives to serve and protect those who are weak and vulnerable in the world. Over the years many men and women went to foreign countries to fight for democracy and the rights of people in those warring countries. They did not consider their giving of themselves a sacrifice, neither did

they consider the threat to their own safety or whether they would return home alive. These soldiers saw the need in God`s world and responded to it.

All over Canada on November 11 at 11:00 am Canadians will be asked to stand in silence for two minutes to observe the sacrifices made by our troops, past and present. We honour those who gave their lives so others may live freely. On that same day and at the same hour our soldiers who are fighting in Afghanistan will be standing at attention in honour of their fallen comrades and for those who came before them. These soldiers coming home for the last time in hearses gave just as the widow did; everything. They gave their lives.

The Good News Jesus has for us though, is to follow the example set by the widow and not the wayward scribes. Mathew 6:33 states “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well”. Amen