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## How Hope is Renewed

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As we continue to face more months of COVID-19 isolation, we know how important hope can be to get us through difficult times. Challenging times can come from lost incomes, food insecurity, fear for our physical and emotional well-being, even trying to do all our jobs well in the midst of the pandemic.

It is important to remember that hope is always renewed through the power of the Holy Spirit. Often times, we can see hope renewed in our lives through our ordinary or daily experiences.

An all too ordinary experience these days is seeing on the news the long lines of people throughout the country waiting for a bag or box of groceries to allow their family to eat that week. Reporters interview people waiting in line who share their stories about good jobs lost, illness, or worse.

How do we respond in Christian witness? Do we just feel a sense of guilt because of our privilege? Do we find ways to help out in the midst of the pandemic? Do we send donations of food or funds to a charity dedicated to providing relief from hunger, homelessness, or other distress? Do we consider what we can do to change the world in a small way?

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus tells us a story to help us learn how we as individuals can do small, simple things that are meaningful.

“And Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, 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, all she had to live on.” (Mark 12:41-44)

Jesus watched this poor widow contribute her last two coins -- her last meal -- to the Temple. The Law of Moses demanded that the Israelites were responsible for the care of those in need, like this poor widow. Through the Temple system, money was collected and redistributed in a comprehensive social welfare program. Yet the Temple system, with its powerful, influential leaders, was corrupt. The widow was at the mercy of an unmerciful system. She needed an advocate – and that advocate was Jesus.

Jesus used his power of preaching and teaching to influence change in the Temple system. He called his disciples to action on behalf of the vulnerable. He brought injustice to the attention of his followers.

The words and ministry of Jesus teach us how each one of us can change the world by seeing one another and being in relationship so as to know the joys and sorrows they face. Jesus came to be in relationship with us, the "other" to God, to close the chasm of sin and to give us all that we need.

The Great Commandment reminds us to love God and love one another as Christ loves us. These are the two loves from which God's New Creation springs forth in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is God's call to action for us today – to recognize our sphere of influence – the systems in which we live and serve, whether at work, in the community, our church, and at home. Jesus taught and preached for this action – in policies, in society, and in our hearts.

This story of Jesus speaking about the generosity and vulnerability of the widow should help us think about what each of us can do to be advocates for those who are struggling with hunger, needing health care, or feeling left behind in social justice, economic, or other reforms.

We are gifted with knowledge and reason, and we have the power of the Holy Spirit working through us. We have each other. And that's key for hope. We can do more listening and more praying.

The Lord is glorified, and hope will be renewed by any gift we give when our hearts are in the right place. As individuals we can do small, simple things, and together, we can bring hope and change the world, even when our actions serve in a small way for another person or family.