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### “Go For Broke”

In 1951 MGM released the film *Go for Broke*. A movie that followed the true story of the 100th Battalion's 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the first all Japanese American unit and the most decorated regiment in U.S. history. And a revolutionary one at that, as it hit theaters a decade after Pearl Harbor (the horrific and deadly Japanese attack on America's Hawaiian Naval Base) depicting, for the first time in Hollywood, the Japanese American community in a positive and historically accurate light.

To give you some background (or at least for myself, some of you I am sure are already very familiar with this history), on December 7, 1941 the Japanese Naval Air Force attacked Pearl Harbor, killing over 2,400 Americans. Causing fear to quickly rear its ugly head as suspicion turned to racism. Which moved the US military to immediately strip all Japanese American Service Men of their weapons and treat them (our own soldiers) as a potential threat to the country. Although these service men's weapons were eventually returned to them, trust between the caucasians in command and Japanese Americans volunteering to defend their country was (understandably) fraught with tension. A few months later, on February 19th, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed an Executive Order allowing for the forceful removal, relocation, and incarceration of approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans. Most of whom were second generation, meaning they were NOT immigrants. These American citizens were taken from their homes by the War Relocation Authority and moved to shoddy, isolated, and overcrowded internment camps located in desolate areas around the country.

But, somehow, even after having been vilified, racially discriminated, and locked away in (what can only be described as) concentration camps by their country and president, over 1,000 of those same Japanese American men found themselves willing and able to serve their country in the fight for freedom and justice. On February 1, 1943 Roosevelt activated the 442nd Regimental Combat Team comprised wholly of Japanese Americans, both from the mainland and Hawaii. With nothing left to lose these men volunteered to give everything they had to offer. Both, the Hawaiian soldiers who had had their rights as trained servicemen stripped, some having even lost loved ones in Pearl Harbor, AND the mainland soldiers who left their families behind in the internment camps throughout our country. Aptly the 442nd regiment adopted the motto “Go, for broke” (a popular gambling slang in Hawaii), as they took all they had left and put it on the line to win the two wars they were desperately fighting. The war in Europe against the Germans and the war at home against racial prejudice.

We hear a similar story in our Gospel from Mark today as Jesus comments on the widow's mite (m-i-t-e, being the smallest monetary coin during Jesus' time). In hearing the story of the poor widow who puts in her two small copper coins we are often invited to think about what a magnificent gift this woman has made, giving all she had to the temple, trusting wholly in God. But, there is more to this story than simply her extravagant act of sacrificial giving. While, at first it sounds as if Jesus is praising the widow for giving ALL she has, I would suggest that he is instead (at least to a point) observing the detrimental situation of this woman's life. As she finds herself trapped in a system that seeks to benefit the privileged, while continuing to take advantage, or at the very least, ignore, the plight of the poor. As Jesus warns us, “beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplace.” Because, while these religious men, interpreters and teachers of God's law, were the keepers of the financial welfare for vulnerable individuals, like widows, some of them also, and unfortunately, took advantage of these same defenseless persons. As the scribes were known for taking more than was owed them. All while encouraging the poor and the widowed to continue giving generously to the temple even out of their abject poverty.

As is depicted in the film “Go for Broke” the 442nd regiment eventually joined together because they sought not only to find hope in a hopeless situation but also because they wanted to fight for it. Which I believe is expressed by one of the most touching scenes in our film, that captures the spirits of this unit. As Tommy, a young man from Hawaii, whose parents died in the Pearl Harbor attack, comes across a starving family while the unit is serving in France. From the beginning of our film, as Tommy reveals the death of his family, we watch him over and over again go without mail from loved ones while his comrades continually rejoice at the arrival of packages and correspondence. Lonely for outside attention and adoration, Tommy finds a pig during their first post in Italy and takes the pig on as his companion throughout the tour. Toting him around in his duffle bag and leading him by leash on their journey. But, as Tommy enters the home of a French civilian family, who has lost everything to the war, even the ability to feed themselves, Tommy sees the malnourished children and hears the cries of a starving baby. Wanting to assist, Tommy offers the father his last two packs of cigarettes, one of his more valuable items. But, the father says, while he would love a smoke the two packs will no longer afford him even a chicken to feed his famished family. As Tommy leaves the home he turns to his beloved swine friend who has been accompanying him on leash, and pats the pig on the head, knowing what he has to do. Returning to the French civilians home Tommy in the most heartbreaking and honorable posture offers his friend, the pig, to the father. Knowing it’s not enough, Tommy offers all he has to give.

So what is Jesus getting at as he points out that, “[the widow] out of her poverty has put in everything she [has], all she [has] to live on.” I believe, in his effort to show compassion and acknowledge her sacrificial gift, Jesus is encouraging us to see the bigger picture and the larger truth. The truth, at least here, that when we ignore those who need us most, in this example the widow, we miss out on seeing, acknowledging, and returning the immense gifts they have to bring.

This week, in our country, has probably left many of us with many feelings. Some possibly of hope, and others maybe of dismay. Either way, this Veterans Day I want to be especially mindful of the gratitude that our veterans are worthy of, as we remember their example of self sacrifice for the betterment of us all. In this way, the 442nd unit is a reminder, to me, of what it means to hope in spite of hopelessness, to give when everyone else is taking, and to serve for peace and justice, because it is who are both as members of these United States and more so as part of the human family. And, as Christians I am reminded of Jesus’ ability at the temple to see the goodness of our human nature despite the selfishness of a larger system. As he points out the faithfulness of one woman who has nothing, and reminds us of our call to see her too, to respond like Tommy, and to fight for the greater good like the 442nd battalion. Today, may we too “Go for broke!” Not because we have nothing to lose, but because we have everything to gain!