

Mark 12:38-44

We've just heard a very well known text about a poor widow giving an offering at the temple. Jesus compares this widow to the rich scribes who were giving a lot of money into the treasury and he says: "This widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty."

As we read this text, we think right away that this story is about giving to the church. Well I believe it is. But at the same time, I believe the message of this story is much deeper and goes much further. And so I'd like us to look at the poor widow story today from two different perspectives. The first one is about giving offering. And as much as we'd like not to hear this message, this text **does** talk about giving.

Jesus said that many rich people put large sums into the treasury. Now let me explain this temple treasury we're talking about. The inner area of the Temple contained three courts. The easternmost court was the Court of the Women, and it contained the Temple treasury where people donated their money. There was a colonnade that ran around the court, and within it, against the wall, the thirteen chests, or 'trumpets,' for charitable contributions were placed. These thirteen chests were narrow at the mouth and wide at the bottom, shaped like trumpets. There were actually eleven treasure chests of the Temple for the voluntary offerings of money, and then also two at the Gate of Susan, for the half-shekel tax. Their specific objects were carefully marked on them. Nine were for the receipt of what was legally due by worshippers; the other four for strictly voluntary gifts.

And so Jesus together with his disciples sat down in the Court of the Women and watched the crowd putting money into the chests. I believe that one of the reasons why he did this was to teach his disciples about giving and generosity. When the disciples saw the rich throw the big sums of money into the treasury, they probably thought to themselves, look at these dedicated and generous people. But it was the poor woman, a widow, who was lifted up by Jesus. Not because of the amount she gave, but because she gave all she had to live on.

The poor widow put her trust in God, who comes first before anything else and is worth to give to. She trusted that God will provide for her. She gave to God all she had to live on because she believed that God will not leave her without provision. Her giving testified about her relationship with God. There were many other people that gave much more, but they gave out of abundance, not first fruits, but the leftovers. And so compared to the poor widow, in God's eyes, they have given less than she did.

And so yes this story is about giving for it puts a mirror in front of us, and helps us to ask ourselves a question: "Are we giving to God the first fruits of what he has blessed us with or are we giving him the leftovers out of our abundance?" Do we trust God that when we give he will provide for us and we'll still have more than enough or are we worried, that we'll go hungry?" These were the questions that disciples had to answer for themselves as Jesus pointed out to them the poor widow; these are the questions we'll have to answer for ourselves as well.

But as I said, I believe there are two different ways we can look at this poor widow story. The second perspective is connected to her giving but goes a step further. When we hear Jesus lifting the poor woman up he says that she out of her poverty has put in everything she had. She put in everything she had. Now here is the question. Let's stop thinking about money, imagine that there is none. And now imagine that you're coming to the temple or the church and God wants you to give him everything you have. Not the money, everything else you have. (pause) Just think about it. How many times have we come to church and gave God everything we have?

Our time, our talent, our love and uncompromised attention, our trust and faith, (pause) our worry, our pain, our doubt, our everyday struggles, (pause) everything we have... See the message of this story is that God does not want us to give him out of our abundance. He doesn't want us to give him only the good things, but he especially wants us to give him the bad things. All those things that burden us, that separate us from him. The poor widow gave out of her poverty; she has put in everything she had, that means good and bad.

I believe that when we look at our faith lives, often times we see poverty. When we look at our relationships we see poor quality. When we look at our work lives we see busyness and dissatisfaction. When we look at our lives overall they are cluttered with junk we don't need. And we come to the church each week, and yet nothing is changing. Because we're giving to God only what we decide to give. But God wants us to give him everything. Our whole lives. So he can take them into his loving arms, change them, fix them and transform them into something new.

As Jesus pointed out the poor widow to his disciples in the Temple they were forced to ask themselves a question: "Am I willing to give everything to my God, good and bad? Am I willing finally to surrender to him, to let him be the Lord of my life, to let him lead and guide me? Am I willing to accept the challenge to follow him, am I willing to stand up for my belief in him, am I willing to let him to change my life, my family, my relationships? Christ has the power to do so, if we let him.

The Apostle Paul says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" See when God sent his Son Jesus to us, the new has come. When Jesus decided to obey his Father's will and sacrificed his life for us, the new has come. When Christ was resurrected and ascended to heaven, the new has come. And remember the promise of new heaven and earth that still lies ahead of us?

In the midst of these events of Christ's death and resurrection the Disciples of Christ came across some serious decision making. Will they follow this resurrected Christ, or not? Will they accept his love and sacrifice, or not? Will they become a new creation, or not?

God has done his part. In fact he continues to do his part. And as he extends his welcoming hand to us, as he loves us unconditionally and is willing to forgive us over and over again... he asks us to do only one thing: To accept his invitation as we give our lives, everything we have to him. Now that's the call to discipleship and only you can answer this call of God's love.

Amen