

Proper 27 B
Mark 12:38-44
November 10, 2024

“The Next Step”
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As he taught, he said, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.’ He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor 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 has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’

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How many of us, upon hearing the text of the Widow’s Offering, assume that we are about to hear a stewardship sermon? That sermon would go something like this: “You should give to the church, as much as you are able, just like the widow did, and you will be blessed for your faithfulness.” Preachers often lift up the widow’s example of selflessness, her complete surrender to providence, and the heavenly value of her offering over the much larger contributions of the wealthy... Let me assure you, that is NOT the sermon you are about to hear.

Our text finds Jesus doing one of his favorite things: railing against the scribes who like to be noticed, expect places of honor, and devour widow's houses by usurping what little they have through coercion or extortion for the support of the elaborate building program and staffing needs of the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus then directs his disciples' attention to the poor widow woman, a real- life case-in-point. She has absolutely nothing left in the world except these two coins, equivalent to the pay received for about 12 minutes of labor.

In a society where there was no socially implemented safety net for the elderly or the impoverished, and in a culture where woman had little to no earning potential, this woman would've relied on begging to make ends meet. This was truly all she had and as one commentator points out, "Jesus does not laud the woman[’s offering]. Contrary to many sermons delivered since which encourage people to this level of sacrificial giving, Jesus does not lift the beggar-widow up as an example, or suggest that anyone ought to emulate her. She is not a positive example, but rather the (barely) living representation of a crying shame. She represents the on-going exploitation of the poor by the Temple elite."¹

No doubt, the widow believed she was doing good, but Jesus mourns such a twisted view of sacrifice perpetuated by the professionally pious of his day. She gave all she had...but she should not have been expected to.

Far from a call to emulate the widow, our text from Mark's Gospel demands that we look hard at the church of Jesus in this time and place, in twenty-first century America, and ask difficult questions. Who are we ministering to: just the powerful, the wealthy, the elite, or also those who are hungry, hurting, lonely, or in need? Do we benefit from or tacitly uphold systems of oppression that make it too easy for someone like this widow to be unseen, unheard, and exploited? And, in this post-election

¹ John Petty. "Mark 12:38-44," Progressiveinvolvement.com, November 2, 2009:
https://www.progressiveinvolvement.com/progressive_involvement/2009/11/lectionary-blogging-mark-12-3844.html.

moment, what are we being called upon to give – to do – that will be a healing balm for this divided nation?

The truth is, regardless of who won the election on Tuesday, our mandate – the church’s mandate – stays the same. Walking in the footsteps of Jesus, we are called to love – friend and foe alike; to welcome others extravagantly, no matter who they are or where they are on their journey of faith and life; to work tirelessly for Jesus’ dream of heaven’s realm in our midst where all are welcome, all are loved, all are brought into community, and all have enough. We are called to stand with those who are oppressed, who are exploited, whose voices are silenced, whose very existence is ignored. We are called to celebrate the gifts of all people, be they Democrats or Republicans; women, men, or non-binary; old or young; Christian, another faith, or no faith; regardless of creed, color, socioeconomic status, mental or physical ability, or citizenship status. We are called to look beyond the immediate, to the deeper work of justice, mercy, and peace. We are called not just to criticize or protest the systems of the world, but to be agents of transformation within them. We are called to build bridges, to build coalitions, to stand in the gap. The church’s mandate – our mandate – has not changed, will never change. It is the world that we seek to change.

And so, whether you are celebrating or grieving, hopeful or fearful, inspired or disillusioned, remember that you are part of a community whose goals ultimately transcend the priorities of any political party and *our* work is not done. As long as there is violence and war, oppression and injustice, exclusion and exploitation, and needs go unmet, our work is not done – the church’s work is not done.

Now, I know that some of us – maybe all of us – are tired. Elections are exhausting, no matter the outcome. The scope of our work is big – monumental, even – and we may not be sure how to begin, or even if we have the energy to begin. So, start small. Identify the next step. Perhaps it’s a smile at someone you disagree with; a soft word to a stranger; a meal for a homeless person; a note of appreciation to an elected official; a kind

word to an estranged friend or family member; your name added to a petition; a monetary gift to a non-profit organization; or something else. If you're feeling fatigued, start small. Care for yourself. Care for one another. Take time. And then, when you're ready, take another step. We know where we're headed. Our mandate is clear and our calling is sure. Together, we will love, welcome, work, celebrate, and stand with one another as we change the world. May it be so. Amen.