

Facebook LIVE  
May 3, 2020  
Rev. Kelley L. Becker

Mark 12:38-44(NRSV)

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 marketplaces, 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."

(Conversation with Children)

Boys and girls, I know some of you have some toys to de-clutter during this time. But before you get busy with that, I want to talk especially to you. When I was young, maybe 5 or 6, about the same age some of you are right now, the church I attended with my grandma and grandpa gave each child what they called a blessing box. They told us that every day we should put some money in the blessing box as we thanked God for our families, friends, and for everything good that happened that day. I liked the idea of putting my money in the box each night at bedtime and I looked forward to the day when I would bring the box back to church. We were going to stack them up at the front of the sanctuary so everyone could see them. And then we were planning to use the money to buy Christmas presents for some children in our community.

But, as the day to present our boxes grew closer, I began to worry. I worried that I hadn't put enough money in the box. I felt embarrassed that my blessing box wasn't all the way full. Instead of looking forward to taking my box to the front of the sanctuary. I was scared. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt like what you had to give wasn't good enough? I've been wondering this week how

the woman in the story I just read felt when she dropped her two small coins in the offering. Do you think she was scared? Or embarrassed?

When Jesus saw what she had given, he talked to his disciples about her. He told them that what she had given was enough. In fact, he said because she didn't have a lot to give, but had given all she had, her offering was greater than the offering of the ones who had so much that they didn't even miss what they had given. Jesus valued the woman and valued her offering.

Imagine a time when you are really, really hungry. Two of your friends come along. One of them has an apple. The other one has a whole bag of apples. The friend with the one apple gives it to you when she finds out you are hungry. The friend with the whole bag of apples gives you two apples. The friend who had one apple and gave it to you gave sacrificially. Sacrificially is a big word. What it means in this story is that the friend will really miss that apple. Why? It was all she had. But the friend with the whole bag of apples, even though he gave you more apples, he still has many more apples. He will not go hungry. While his gift of two apples was generous, it was not sacrificial.

Just like the woman in the story, who gave sacrificially, we can give what we have to God too. Of course, we can give our money to the church, like the woman did, but we can offer our whole selves to God too. What would it be like to use your words as an offering to God? What things would you choose to say? What would it be like to use your actions as an offering to God? What things would you choose to do? Boys and girls, what you have and who you are is enough. The way you love your family and your friends, when you share your toys and say kind words...those offerings make God really happy. Keep being you. God loves you so much!

As you finish your de-cluttering or maybe start your de-cluttering, think about giving some of what you have to other people. What might you sacrifice so someone else has a new toy to play with? If your de-cluttering is finished or if you are in the mood to draw instead, I invite you to draw a picture as an offering to someone who has done something nice for you this week. Whatever you draw, it's good enough!

(Sermon)

And grown-ups, you are enough too. Often, this story of the widow's offering is used by ministers to convince members of the church to give money more money to the church. Don't get me wrong, I think giving to the church is an important spiritual practice, but this story really isn't about that. This isn't a stewardship story, it's a justice story. Let me explain.

The last few weeks, as we've made our way through the Gospel of Mark's stories of Jesus' last week, we've seen Jesus interact with religious leaders who have challenged him and even tried to trick him. And we've seen that he always seemed to stay one step ahead of them and, as he does, the tension between them and Jesus increases. The story of the widow's offering is told in contrast to the story right before it of Jesus' criticism of a group of religious leaders, the scribes. Scribes, in Israel, were initially secular officials who were responsible for legal documents associated with financial and political matters. They were known as competent writers and were held in high esteem for their particular skillset. All of this distinguished them as a class of their own and afforded them position, money, and power in the ancient world.

After the exile, scribes branched out, gaining further prominence as interpreters and teachers of God's law. Unfortunately, some scribes took advantage of their position. It is those scribes Jesus criticized that day in the temple. Jesus' criticism centered on the fact that these individuals who supposedly knew what God was all about didn't really represent God very well. They enjoyed the limelight, the flashiest clothes, and the best place at the table, seemingly not particularly concerned about the things that God was concerned about like "widows, orphans, and strangers." In other words, this was another example of religious authorities looking out for themselves instead of their people.

So, I imagine Jesus saying this about the scribes to the crowd and then taking his disciples and going to find a place to sit. And he said to them, "Just chill here for a minute and people watch with me." And so, they did. They watch one well-dressed, wealthy person after another walk up to the treasury and pull out a handful of money, while hoping people are watching, as they ceremoniously drop the coins into the box. These weren't quiet paper dollar bills or checks. This was noisy money. Putting a lot of money in the treasury would have gotten people's attention.

But Jesus pointed out, for these folks, like the friend with the whole bag of apples, their offering wasn't much of a sacrifice. For them, it was a bit of spare change, they weren't going to have to tighten their belts or change their ways at all. And then the widow stepped up, very quietly, perhaps not wanting to be noticed, to drop in her two copper coins: an ordinary act by an ordinary person, the kind of thing no one usually notices. But Jesus noticed. Author and Episcopal priest, Fr. Jim Friedrich describes the widow's action like this, "Such a small, humble gesture by the sort of person who has been virtually invisible in every society—poor, powerless, unimportant, not male."

<https://www.episcopalcafe.com/another-look-at-the-widows-mite/>

She was not invisible to Jesus.

Jesus calls our attention to the woman. He asks us to see beyond her two coins that barely made any noise when she placed them in the treasury. He asks us to really see her and maybe take a moment to connect the dots about where the money for the flashy clothes the scribes were wearing came from. The widow gave all she had, for what? So the priests and scribes could dress well? So her money, what little she had, could support the collaboration of the temple leaders with Rome? Jesus shows us that the temple, that should have been a place of safety and refuge for the vulnerable ones, was instead using them, collecting their money while the leaders were sacrificing to ensure the well-being of the ones entrusted to their care. In Jesus' words, they were, "devouring the widows' houses." For the widow at the temple, there is nobody working for justice on her behalf. There is only her sacrifice. But who is sacrificing for her?

There are a lot of things about this story that seem a bit far removed from our world today. But we should not dismiss them too quickly. Like the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world in which Jesus lived, the gap between the ones with wealth and power and the ones without is wide. And just as the temple and temple authorities were supposed to stand in that gap for the ones who were vulnerable, today's Church is supposed to do the same. But, too often, churches have used the position and power they have to do the opposite. We have told members of the LGBTQ+ community they are not enough, not "good" enough to lead our churches or to say "I do" in our sanctuaries. We have built bigger buildings for our programs while our neighbors have slept under bridges and in homeless shelters. We have ignored the obvious lie in the artwork in our sanctuaries, hallways, and

Sunday School rooms. Jesus was not a clean-cut, white, blue-eyed gentle man as he is often pictured. He was a brown-skinned, homeless, refugee who was willing to sacrifice his life for justice. And that's what he expected from the religious leaders of his day and I believe if he was here today he would expect the same of us.

Jesus didn't sacrifice for the sake of sacrificing. He sacrificed because there were people suffering, he sacrificed because the well-being of other people, the opportunity to change things and bring about justice for the ones who were vulnerable, was worth it to him. In the story of the widow, we are asked to consider the ones in our midst who need us to sacrifice for them, to make justice happen for them. And maybe we are asked to see a little of ourselves in the widow. In her, we see an ordinary woman who was willing to sacrifice what she had, hoping it would be enough. Jesus said it was. How about you? Are you willing to give yourself to the ways of God? Whatever you have, whoever you are, it's enough. You are enough. Amen.