

Proper 27 (B) 25th Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy's Episcopal Church / Creve Coeur, Missouri
The Rev. Paul A. Metzler, D.Min. / Priest Associate
November 10/11, 2018 Gospel: Mark 12:38-34

Today's gospel reading has been known 'forever' as the story of "the Widow's Mite." I personally think that is a very questionable title or characterization for this portion of Mark's Gospel. It might better be titled: "*Jesus criticizes pompous religious professionals & uncaring religious communities.*"

He criticizes the respected religious leaders, the scribes, clergy-types of their day for traipsing around in long robes, expecting deference and respect based on their status, having great front row seats in temple (read: church) and at banquets & say long prayers for the sake of appearance. He also criticizes members of the religious establishment who though they make large donations seem oblivious of the needs of others – in this case, most particularly of the widow who is giving so generously, indeed, sacrificially, out of her poverty.

Well, there you have it. I'm sure he meant someone other than me. Or us.

But nevertheless, it is something for us to ponder.

To think of this story as being about money only is to greatly diminish its power and meaning. While on the surface it is about money it is much more, more even than about giving or even generosity. Though it includes all of those, at its deepest level it is about *freedom – the freedom that underlies the ability to make an offering – a true offering – of one's life.*

Jesus is sitting outside the Temple – that great symbol and center of Jewish life and culture. The Temple, set on a hill, was magnificent and commanding in its enormity and prominence physically. I remember visiting Washington DC for the first time and coming around a bend in the roads and suddenly having a head-on view of the Capitol building. I can imagine the Temple was something like that. And if you combine it in your mind with the National Cathedral as a religious and spiritual center of significance and influence, we begin to appreciate the enormity of the Temple's influence and power in the time of Jesus.

Jesus has finally arrived in Jerusalem and is sitting outside the Temple.

No doubt he is contemplating what he'd said on that long journey that he was to fulfill the ancient prophecy "to give his life as a ransom for many."

No doubt he is contemplating that he'd said, "We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death." (Mark 10:33-34)

It hasn't happened yet, but he is watching and listening to see and hear what God was asking of him.

Imagine with me, if you will, that over the course of his lifetime, Jesus has come to know deep in his heart that God is using his life for something very special. He has come to sense that God is going to use not just his life but in some special and mysterious way his death as well.

His teachings on this have attracted a strong following – people felt the power of his compassion. They loved to be in his presence. Many were drawn to him like metal is drawn to a magnet.

Jesus has come to Jerusalem because he knew that the sacrifice of his life would take place there. He would give his life so that we might more clearly know and understand the love God has for us.

As he sits outside the Temple contemplating these things he sees those coming to give their contributions are trying to draw attention to how generous they were being, But Jesus is not impressed. He can tell their hearts are not open. That their hidden desires and secrets are for accolades; that they are giving just from the top of their lives, not from the depths of their heart and life.

And in the midst of that crowd of important people, he notices a widow, a person usually invisible and voiceless in the glorious Temple and public society, making her way quietly forward, careful not to bother the important people, to offer two small copper coins, two mites, two pennies. The smallest value coins of the time.

Jesus notices her, he has compassion and understanding. Anonymous and unseen, she had no voice in temple or society. She lives on the margins, but comes to the center of Jesus attention and love. This woman who no one regarded as important becomes for Jesus a touch-stone of the freedom to make an offering, a full and complete sacrificial offering, of one's life.

He does not affirm her poverty or the lack of justice for the widow, the orphans and the alien stranger in the land. Remember he started with the word "Beware." Beware the religious world that devours the widow's houses, that looks spiritual on the surface with generous giving, but fails to understand or address the heart of the matter.

The heart of the matter is the love and freedom to make a true offering of one's life.

Jesus' notice of her profound giving prefigures the loving sacrifice he is about to make. He has broken bread with sinners; he's healed the sick and proclaimed good news to the

poor. He is about to stretch out his arms on the hard wood of the cross so that everyone might come with reach of his saving embrace.

But in this moment he notices a widow unhindered by fear of want, resentment or anxiety. He holds her up to contemplate, even for us who seek to follow Jesus these many centuries later. He holds her up as an icon of freedom, faithfulness and love.

In giving his life on the cross for the sake of the world Jesus offers us the ultimate icon of the freedom to give our life to seek and serve Christ in all persons, for the sake of our world.

In the strength of his life, death and resurrection may we find and deepen that freedom.
AMEN.

This sermon drew on insights from:
The Rev. Dr. Christine E. Reimers
The Rev. William C. Redfield