

Sunday Lesson – November 7, 2021

GOSPEL: Mark 12: 38-44

“The Widow’s Mite”

Context

“Two brief stories in Mark 12:38-44 deal with wealth issues in ways that are still challenging today. First are those who think they are more important than everyone else. In verses 38-40 Jesus specifically denounces the scribes. In Mark’s estimation they are self-important, arrogant, and self aggrandizing. This section of Mark’s gospel, since Jesus’ triumphal entry, has been dominated by controversy and antagonistic interaction between Jesus and various groups with leadership responsibilities in first-century Judaism. It is not surprising, then, that we find here a final nail in the coffin, a sweeping condemnation of the scribes.

This short text in Mark is replete with echoes and interesting interpretations of certain themes from Israel’s scriptures. Widows are often provided as the example *par excellence* as those to whom caring justice should be meted out. It is interesting that, in Deuteronomy 14:28-29, certain of the Jewish leaders (in this case, the Levites) are listed as among the aliens, orphans and widows who need support from the community because they have devoted themselves entirely to God.

The scribes here, with their ostentatious robes and prayers and their insistence on being first have lost their tether to the demands of God. Mark’s Jesus has already told us that whoever wants to be first must be last and servant of all (10:35), so the basis on which the judgment rests in 12:38-40 has already been established.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-32-2/commentary-on-mark-1238-44-2*)

Insight

“There are several things that the story of the widow’s mite teaches us. First, God sees what man overlooks. The big gifts in



the temple were surely noticed by people; that’s probably what the disciples were watching. But Jesus saw what no one else did: He saw the humble gift of a poor widow. This was the gift that Jesus thought worthy of comment; this was the gift that the disciples needed to be aware of. The other gifts in the treasury that day made a lot of noise as they jingled into the receptacles, but the widow’s mites were heard in heaven.

Second, God’s evaluation is different from man’s. The widow’s two mites added up to a penny, according to man’s tabulation. But Jesus said that she had given *more* than anyone else that day. How could this be, when “many rich people threw in large amounts?” The difference is one of proportion. The rich were giving large sums, but they still retained their fortunes; the widow “put in everything—all she had to live on.” Hers was a true sacrifice; the rich had not begun to give to the level of her sacrifice.

Third, God commands giving in faith. Here was a woman in need of *receiving* charity, yet she had a heart to give. Even though the amount was negligible—what could a widow’s mite buy?—she gave it in faith that God could use it. The widow’s faith is also evident in the fact that she gave the *last* of her money. Like the widow of Zarephath, who gave her last meal to Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:7–16), the widow in the temple gave away her last means of self-support. Does that mean the widow left the temple completely destitute, went home, and died of starvation? No. The Bible teaches that God provides for our needs (Matthew 6:25–34). We don’t know the details of this particular widow’s future, but we can be certain that she was provided for. Just as God provided for the widow and her son in Elijah’s day, God also provided for the widow in Jesus’ day.” (*Excerpts from gotquestions.org/widows-mite.html*)

Gospel Reading

“He continued teaching. “Watch out for the religion scholars. They love to walk around in academic gowns, preening in the

radiance of public flattery, basking in prominent positions, sitting at the head table at every church function. And all the time they are exploiting the weak and helpless. The longer their prayers, the worse they get. But they'll pay for it in the end." Sitting across from the offering box, he was observing how the crowd tossed money in for the collection. Many of the rich were making large contributions. One poor widow came up and put in two small coins—a measly two cents. Jesus called his disciples over and said, "The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford—she gave her all." The Message

What It Could Mean?

"Mark 12:38-44 bridges two different contexts. Mark 12:38-40 is located in the Temple; the audience includes those in the Temple, the disciples, and various religious leaders. In Mark 12:41-44, Jesus is opposite the treasury, and the disciples are the primary audience. The shift from the scribe who was "not far from the kingdom of God" seems quite far off from the scribes Jesus describes in verses 38-40.

What would have likely been a surprise, however, was what happens in the next scene of the text. As people give from their excess, a widow gives two *lepta*, the smallest monetary denomination in first century Palestine. Jesus, somehow knowing this woman's financial situation, indicates that she has put in her whole life. The NRSV here softens the Greek expression *olon ton bion autēs* from "her whole life" to "all she had to live on." While the phrase can mean the latter, the former connects this phrase with Jesus' words in Mark 12:30 ("You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength"). Those whose sacrifices provided for the Temple financially were not the ones who gave the most. Rather than lifting up those

with power and influence in the community, Jesus identifies the widow as having given more: she gives herself.

Regardless of whether the widow's offering is an example or a critique, it is crucial to remember that the house of God is not a place to devour widows. It is not a place where anyone should be devoured. There is a difference between **giving** everything and having everything **taken away**.

The cruciform existence, or the life of discipleship, according to Mark, involves giving one's life (Mark 8:34-37). It is important, however, to keep front and center what consumes us. If we are consumed by honor, power, social media, beauty, or money, they will eat us alive, and they ultimately leave us empty. Emptiness devours us, and it promises a life it cannot give. Part of the task of preaching is to identify hunger for Good News when spiritual junk food is readily on offer. Invite people to taste and see: when you give your whole life to God, it becomes fuller than you imagined." (Excerpts from *workingpreacher.org*; Revised Common Lectionary by Amanda Brobst-Renaud)

Readings for Further Study

- Luke 21: 1-4 *Luke version of the widow's mite*
- 1 Kings 17: 7-16 *Widow of Zarephath gave her last meal to Elijah*
- Matthew 6: 25-34 *God provides for our needs*

Thought for the Day

"Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" ~ Matthew 10: 39

A Prayer

Loving Father, you have made us your people, richly provided us with good gifts and called us to live for you. May gratitude be in our hearts, may generosity be in our hands, may justice and righteousness guide our feet, and may the life of your kingdom and the joy of heaven be found among us. **Amen.**