

Focus on Mark 12:38–44

WHAT is important to know?

— From “*Exegetical Perspective*,” Robert A. Bryant

Religious office is not a safeguard against hypocrisy and greed. Indeed, this passage, like many others, shows that unfaithfulness can masquerade as faithfulness and pretense can parade as piety, even at the highest levels in the household of faith. Conversely, some of the greatest acts of faith occur simply, selflessly, and unobtrusively. Jesus helps his followers distinguish the reality of faithfulness from all counterfeits. In today’s Gospel reading (Mark 12:38–44), Jesus gives a stern warning against religious hypocrisy (vv. 38–40) and offers encouragement to exercise radical trust in God (vv. 41–44).

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “*Theological Perspective*,” Emilie M. Townes

In today’s world, sacrifice often means something very different from an act of devotion or worship. It often means giving up more than we should and less than we can. In the United States, we ask those in the working class and those who are poor to bear the weight of tax cuts that benefit those who are wealthier. Often, those who earn less pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes than those who are wealthier. This kind of sacrifice echoes Jesus’ warning in the passage for us to beware.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “*Pastoral Perspective*,”
Rodger Y. Nishioka

Together, these two sections read as a lament for and an indictment upon any religious system that results in a poor widow giving all she has so that the system’s leaders may continue to live lives of wealth and comfort. The attack is not on Jewish religious practice. The attack is on any religious practice that masks egotism and greed. The scribes are like leeches on the faithful, benefiting from a religious system that allows poor widows to sacrifice what little they have. We should be outraged by any system that appropriates the property of the poor and the near destitute in order to perpetuate wealth for the elite.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “*Homiletical Perspective*,”
Pete Peery

Moreover, this is the last scene in Jesus’ public ministry. From here all that remains in Mark’s telling is the temple discourse and the passion narrative. So this widow offers a glimpse into what Jesus is about. He is on the way to giving “the whole of his life” for something that is corrupt and condemned: all of humanity, the whole world. Jesus calls the disciples, the church, to himself and points out this poor widow and her manner of giving. Watching her will not lead to unvarnished support for religious institutions. But could it reinforce the call of Christ to the church to give the whole of its life for the sake of those who do not deserve such a gift?