

Everything She Had

COMMUNION

November 7, 2021

Mark 12:38-44

³⁸ 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, ³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ 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. ⁴⁴ 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."



Today we continue delving into the call to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves with a passage from Mark 12. We

begin in verse 38 with a counter-example and then, starting in verse 41, we turn to the example set by the widow who gave everything she had. As followers of Jesus Christ we must be aware of how not to act as well as being aware of how to act as we strive to live as an example of Christ's love in the world. As we begin this time together, let us begin with a word of prayer...

As our text for today begins in verse 38 of Mark 12, Jesus is speaking of the religious leaders. These are the same religious leaders that Jesus was arguing with at the start of last week's text. These are the same religious leaders who were the target of Jesus' anger in Mark 11, when he cleared the temple of the money changers and tipped over the tables of those who were selling doves and other animals to be used for the ritual sacrifices. In Mark 11:17 Jesus declared, *"You have made it a den of robbers."* It was this incident that led the religious leaders to begin to look for a way to kill Jesus.

These two parts of our text for today are placed together for a purpose. Mark placed them side by side for a reason. It is a further calling to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Mark begins with Jesus' critique of the scribes and other religious leaders. His teaching begins with these words:

"Beware of the scribes..." and focuses in on the behaviors that they exhibit that detract from their witness. Jesus sites their long robes, their expectations



of recognition, and their choosing the seats of honor at church and at weddings as signs of their inward focus. These "look at me" behaviors called attention to themselves and not to God. Jesus goes on to condemn them for *"devouring widow's houses"* and for saying lengthy prayers *"for sake of appearance"*—another "look at me" behavior. Some in the temple had been known to use their positions of authority to convince widows to give large sums, leaving them with very little to live on. In these "look at me" behaviors the religious leaders are breaking the first great commandment. They are not loving God but are loving self instead. In the ways the religious leaders were taking advantage of widows they were clearly not loving neighbor as self.

In these verses, Jesus is warning us not to be fooled by appearances. Just because someone appears to be religious does not mean that they are. These big shows of piety do not impress Jesus and they do not impress God. There is also a word of warning for us in these words about the religious leaders. I think we must also ask ourselves when are we tempted to act like these teachers of the law? When do we go out of our way, acting all religious, so that others notice or know that we are a Christian? What do we do to show or even flaunt our faith? What are our flowing robes, lengthy prayers, important seats?

Last Sunday I spoke of how we in the church – those who once lost, who were once broken, who were once sinners – how we can sometimes forget where we were before Christ found us. We can become gate keepers, determiners of who is welcome or not, of who is worthy or unworthy of God’s grace. Sometimes we can do so unintentionally. Here is an example of how that could happen. During the worship series from the book of James one Sunday was about making distinctions. You might remember that I wore old shorts and an old mission trip t-shirt with paint stains on them. I received some good-natured teasing about how I was dressed. *"A little casual for church, eh pastor?"* I do not believe the comments or ribbing was in any way, shape, or form mean-spirited or whatever.



Now imagine if someone was walking in right behind the person that made the comment. Or imagine if someone brand new to church overhead someone in the row in front of or behind them making a similar comment to their spouse or the couple sitting next to them. Just pretend with me that this new person had changed clothes three or four time before coming to church that day.

Imagine what would be going through their mind as they evaluated how they had dressed for church that day – too formal? Too casual? Too whatever? Would that new person feel comfortable? Would they be inclined to come back for a second visit?

And to take it a little deeper, imagine if another new person had not been to church in years because of something they had done or because they were now struggling with an addiction or because of some other thing that made them feel unworthy of going to church. But they finally gave in to the neighbor's constant invitations, to the Holy Spirit's tugging, to the inner voice that finally overcame their doubts or fears or anxiety. Then they hear that comment. And then they think, *"I'm dressed okay, but what if these people knew about my addiction... about my struggle... about my past...?"* In both scenarios people can worry about being judged. We can act in ways that become barriers to people coming to church, to feeling welcome, to wanting to come back.



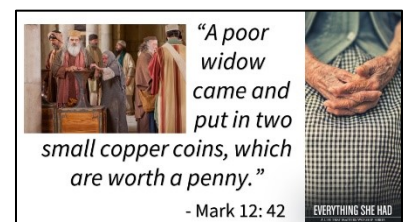
For these religious leaders and for us at times, these behaviors were focused inwardly, on self. They, and we are times, were failing to focus on God, and consequently, were failing to bring God glory. These behaviors were not based on the call to love God or to love neighbor. The religious leaders were wanting and hoarding, grabbing all that they could get their hands on. As we talked about last week, 'love' cannot be a love of ice cream or the Vikings or a love of a good thunderstorm. Love must be genuine, sincere, steadfast. Last Sunday we defined love as *"a feeling of strong or constant affection for a person."* In terms of our Christian faith, love must be focused outward and upward – outward towards others and upwards towards God.



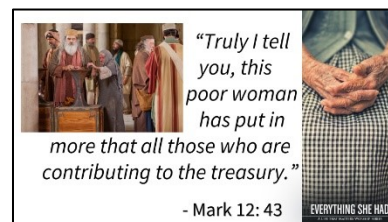
Turning to the second half of our passage from Mark 12, we look at the story known as “The Widow’s Offering” or “The Widow’s Mite” in some translations. As this portion begins, we see Jesus sitting down with his disciples opposite the temple treasury. The focus is on the large metal receptacles that sat out in the public area of the temple courts. They were in the public space so that all would have access to giving at any time of the day. They were not like our felt-lined offering plates, passed only during the time of worship. These large, funnel-shaped receptacles would welcome donations with a loud sound as they coins would tumble down to the bottom. The loud clinking and clanging would no doubt draw attention to those giving to the temple. And there is no doubt that some aimed their offering well, producing loud sounds that echoed across the open temple courts. This “look at me” behavior mirrored the ways that the religious leaders tried to draw attention to themselves as well.

Mark notes that many rich people “*put in large sums*”. I bet that for some the coins were dropped in slowly, in a metered fashion, allowing all to hear how many coins they were putting into the temple treasury. Jesus makes no comment – either positive or negative – on the wealthy giving to the temple. He has already made his point about wanting to make an impression, about wanting to be noticed in his earlier comments about the religious leaders.

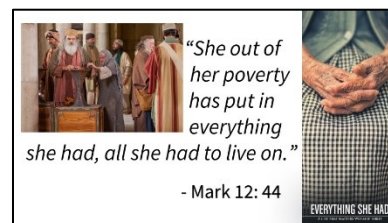
In verse 42 we read, “*A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.*” That last part, of course, would be a more recent addition to the text.



Jesus ignores the noise makers and draws the disciples' attention to the small plink of tiny copper coins dropping into the treasury. Without Jesus calling their attention to the widow's offering, the disciples would have probably missed it altogether. Jesus does call for his disciples' attention. He then he tells them, *"Truly I tell you, this poor woman has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury."* I'm sure some of the disciples questioned what Jesus was saying. For example, at least in his mind, I am sure that Matthew questioned Jesus' initial statement. This former tax collector would have been well aware of how small of a sum the widow gave. Her *"widow's mite"* was a pittance of what the larger donors put in. One could say that she was taking a greater risk, for sure. But to say that she put in more than the others. Really Jesus?



Yes, Jesus says, she put in more. Those that made the money boxes ring out across the temple courts put in from their excess, from their great wealth, from their leftovers, from the interest on the interest. They all contributed out of their excess. But this woman, this poor widow, *"She out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."* That is giving from a different place in the heart. That is giving out of faith and trust in God. In the original text, the Greek the word used here would have been *"bios."* The literal translation was that she "gave her whole life." The widow gave everything she had, literally.



The widow trusted in God and she trusted in the care offered by the temple. Her action was a sign of her trust in God as well as in the community of faith. She trusted the temple and the people who administered the gifts given to this institution. Even though Jesus has recently cleared the temple of its traders of earthly wealth and possessions and even though he has just decried the religious leaders' selfish behaviors, here he presents the widow's offering to the temple as a greater witness to faith than all the others who made offerings that day.

Like with the widow's offering, God wants all we say and do - and give, in whatever form that takes - to come from the heart. Think about the widow again: *"all she has to live on."* Does God call us to this same level of faith? This story today makes me think of the story of Cain and Abel and how they gave to God. Abel brought and offered the first lambs that were born, trusting God to provide more lambs. Cain brought out of the excess that he had already gathered from the fields. In Genesis 4:5 we read, *"The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard."* Cain became jealous and rose up against his brother Abel, pouring out his anger and jealousy, leaving Abel's blood to cry out to God.

The story of Cain and Abel, as with the widow, is not about the amount given. Abel did not give more lambs than Cain gave grain. The widow did not offer up a large amount of wealth. These stories are not about the amount given but are about the cost to the giver. These stories are about trusting in God. These stories are about giving to God what our faith leads us to give and then to move forward in life, believing that God will provide, that there will still be more than enough for our needs.

There is something here in our passage from Mark 12 about the life we are called to live as followers of Jesus Christ. Like the widow, we are called to hold our own life lightly. We are called to hold all our stuff lightly too. Yes, our livelihood as well. Not of this – our possessions, our wealth, even our lives – are ours to hoard, to guard, to store up. All of these things are ours to give away, to bless others with, to use in acts of gratitude and service. We are called, invited, set free from our bondage to our stuff and to ourselves so that we can live and love God and neighbor generously.



This week in the mail you should have received a letter from the church containing an invitation to generosity.

In the envelope was a letter and a card. After reading the letter and deciding on your prayerful response to the invitation, we are asking you to bring your card with you to church for Consecration Sunday on November 21. We invite you to first prayerfully consider how you can support the church financially. Whatever gift you decide to offer can be recorded on the front side of the card. I thank you in advance for the generous support you all offer to Grace United Methodist Church and her ministries. You are awesome.

But I also want to draw your attention to the back side of the card. I ask that each of you check at least two boxes on the back side. Yes, the church is an organization with costs and salaries and all that. Money is necessary for these brick-and-mortar items. The church is also in ministry and resources are needed for outreach events and other programs that seek to connect people to God and to the community of faith. Money is also necessary to fund these missional efforts as well. Even more important than funding these things is, to me, what makes the church the church.

The ways we serve one another and the community, the ways we meet needs and walk alongside people in the valleys of life, the ways we grow in faith as the body of Christ – these are all about loving God and loving neighbor as we develop a servant’s heart, developing a heart of compassion and generosity. These practices and habits are what make the church the church. This is what the back side of the card is all about. It asks how you can become more a part of the life of the church, more a part of the ministry of the church. We often spell “love” t-i-m-e. That is what the back side of the card is asking of you. Again, I thank you in advance for choosing to be present and to be involved in the life of your church.

Returning to our passage for today, the big question to take away today is this: Can we emulate this widow, this woman who was willing to give everything to God, trusting in God alone? Our answer to this question will determine what really matters to each of us as we seek to walk together as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and as the body of Christ known as Grace United Methodist Church. Blessings on you this week and in the weeks to come as we consider this question and this invitation to generosity. Amen and amen.

The BIG question:
Can we emulate this widow, this woman who was willing to give everything to God, trusting in God alone?



Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. How are you challenged to rethink the way you live (or act out) your faith and to reconsider your generosity by today's passage?
- 2) *Pray*. What are your long robes, lengthy prayers, or other "look at me" behaviors that draw attention to you instead of to God? Pray for the strength to live in ways that bring God all the glory all the time.
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 23:1-36. What additional 'charges' does Jesus bring against the religious leaders? How are or can the church today be 'guilty' of some of these things? What can we do to avoid these poor practices?