

The Widow's Great Gift

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[0:00] For your Son, Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. Please be seated. The church year is drawing to an end.

! And our time in the Gospel of Mark is drawing to an end as well.! Three Sundays from now will be Advent 1, the beginning of the new church year.

If you are wondering what I mean by that, and what is the church year, I'm happy to talk to you about it. Ask me after the service, during coffee hour. But part of our time in the lectionary of this year has been primarily in the Gospel of Mark.

And now we come to this very familiar passage, I think for most of us, of the widow's mite, the widow's great gift. And so I invite you to turn with me to page 1009 of your pew Bible, or if you brought your own Bible, to turn to Mark chapter 12, and to our Gospel reading this morning.

There's a story of a man who called the church office one day, asking to speak to the head hog. The secretary, who answered the call, scolded the caller and said, Do you mean the reverend?

[1:24] You should be more respectful when speaking about our pastor. The man apologized, and said he didn't mean any disrespect. He just wanted to let him know he was calling to donate \$50,000 to the capital fund.

The secretary responded, Actually, sir, I think the hog just walked in. Let me get him for you. That seems a trite joke about the way we think about gifts and giving in the church.

And oftentimes when we look at this passage that we are looking at today, oftentimes we think of it as the great text to preach for Stewardship Sunday, or Stewardship Sermon.

And perhaps that is true. Let me say a few, at least I think the church treasurer will want me to speak on Stewardship this morning. And the rest of the vestry might want me to speak on Stewardship this morning.

And then let me say a few things about giving. We will talk more about giving later, but let me say a few things here. I'm glad that no one can accuse us in this church of only preaching about money.

[2:36] I've been your pastor for three and a half years now, and I've yet to preach specifically on giving or stewardship. Mind you, that's not necessarily a point of pride.

I'm not saying that's a good thing or a bad thing. I'm just saying that we don't often talk about money in this church. That's not our aim. We aim to preach the whole counsel of God. And if, and, or when a passage in the Bible touches on giving, I expect we will do that.

We will speak about giving and stewardship. Yet I'm also glad that many in this church give regularly and give generously so the work of the gospel may continue here at Holy Trinity.

I'm grateful for that, and I'm grateful to God for that and for you and for your generosity. But I want to say that this passage in Mark that we have this morning is not primarily about giving or the way you would think of it, about stewardship, the typical way you would think of it.

I think it does talk about stewardship, but we will see the particular way it does in the text this morning. And then I also want you to see that Jesus expects as a giving that the people should bring their offerings to the temple, that people should give.

[3:55] God expects it in the Old Testament. Jesus expects it that that's a giving that people should give unto the work of the Lord. But this story of the widow's mite, we tend to lean extra on preaching it as to the way we ought to give.

But I don't think that's a central point of this passage. It's certainly a story about giving, but it is primarily about the danger of woes in sheep's clothing.

It is about stewardship, right faithful stewardship versus faithless stewardship. It's about what man honors and what God honors and sees.

And so in verse 38 to 40, the first part of this passage, in verse 38 to 40, Jesus taught his disciples to beware of the scribes.

Who are they? Who are the scribes? The scribes were Israel's teachers. They were the teachers of the law. They were well versed in the law of Moses.

[5:00] And they interpreted the holy scriptures in synagogues, during worship, and in civil court. And so they have long robes.

Like, perhaps not quite like I have this morning, but similar. And so we have people like that in our days, right, the scribes will be, not a one-to-one correlation, but they will be the ministers of the gospel in the church today.

It's not a one-to-one correlation, but if you want to think about that, the pastors, the ministers, well, in Israel, the scribes were those. They were the teachers of the law, the interpreters of the law.

They were also lawyers because they were well versed in the law.

So they represented the people in the civil courts of Israel. So, but primarily they were to be shepherds of God's people.

That's who they were meant to be, the scribes. And they were shepherds of people in a way. And so you would have seen that it was shocking for Jesus to tell the people to beware of the scribes.

[6:07] To hear Jesus tell people to be wary of them, to be wary of the people that they're meant to go to for help. That's quite a shocking statement for Jesus to make.

The scribes, in Jesus' day, were the most religious and pious people in Israel. They were respected by the people. But if you've ever read through the Gospel of Mark or any of the Gospels, you would know that since Jesus had been in Jerusalem, particularly in the Gospel of Mark, he's not, the setting of this story is the week, the Passion Week.

This is the week that Jesus is going to go to the cross. He had entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday triumphantly, and now he's going every day from Bethany back to Jerusalem. And all day, he's spending, he's spending all day around the temple teaching.

And while he's there, he's being, he's being around, really, by the scribes and the Pharisees. They were continually bringing questions to him. They're trying to really trap him so that they can arrest him.

But they've failed. But that's the attempt. So this is the setting of this particular text that we have this morning. When Jesus is, Jesus has been in Jerusalem, this is probably the Tuesday of that week.

[7:25] He'd gone to the temple previously, the previous day, he'd gone to the temple to drive out the money changers. Remember that? When he went into the temple and he, in righteous anger, he drove out the money changers and he rebuked them for turning his father's house into a den of thieves.

And so, they, in turn, have continually, this, this, during this early part of the week, confronted Jesus with questions. They're trying to stump him, but they failed.

And, and remember also that at this point, they've already committed to doing what? To killing him. They've committed to killing Jesus. They're just looking for an excuse, any excuse they can find.

They're in search of reasons to entrap him and to arrest him. And so, Jesus, knowing all this and knowing the bankruptcy of these teachers of the law, taught the people, saying, beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seat in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts would devour widows' houses and for pretense they make long prayers.

They will receive the greater condemnation. Jesus named their sins of pride. They like to walk around in long robes.

[8:50] There's a particular dress for rabbis, the teachers of the law, and they particularly want a longer one. Jesus also dressed in like manner because he was a rabbi. So it's not particularly the dress itself that Jesus is critiquing.

It's the manner and the ostentatiousness of their strutting around as if they're better than everybody else. They like to walk around and rob. They like greetings in the marketplaces.

They want you to greet them by their very title. Right? Good rabbi, you know, the reverend father in God, pastor, doctor, so-and-so, putting the letters after their name.

These are the people. These are the scribes. They want all the acknowledgement. And they have the best seats in the synagogues, the places of honor.

They are known around town and even in the churches and the synagogues of their day as respected people and they were afforded their honor and they want it. The glory in all of that, their glory is in that.

[10:06] They only care about their image and the privilege their position gets them. They are status-driven. That's who these scribes are.

The love of God is not in their hearts despite all their outward show of piety. And because they do not love God, they certainly cannot love their neighbors who are the people they're meant to shepherd.

They misuse the gifts of God and the calling of God for their own selfish ends. This is where the scribes are.

This is why Jesus says beware of them. And then the worst indictment of all in verse 40, they devour widows' houses. They devour widows' houses and for pretense they make long prayers. The widow has a special place in God's heart. And many times the prophets indicted Israel in the Old Testament as faithless because of what?

[11:10] Because they neglect the widow. They neglect the fatherless amongst them. And oftentimes the prophets will come along and indict Israel for their failure to care for the widow and the fatherless among them.

The widows are special to God. but here the people whom God has appointed to shepherd the people devour the widows' houses.

They eat up the widows' houses. We're not really told what this might particularly look like but I can imagine if there are lawyers that represent the people it happens even today don't you know it's not hard to imagine our people employ fraudulent means to pray on widows.

Right? They will gain their trust and then promise to represent them and then swindle them out of their money their property.

These are so many things these scribes are doing or maybe promise to pray for them and for a particular prize for a particular token in order to pray.

[12:28] These are the kind of things that these scribes are doing and as I say that maybe you're thinking you're thinking already even in our day that such things still happen in the church.

May I warn you brothers and sisters in Christ that if you go to a church and they're telling you that you must pay you must give something in order for God to act in order to receive the blessing and the grace and the love of God.

They use language like sow a seed beware those are such people that Jesus is wanting of here. Jesus wants you to be faithful in giving.

He wants you to be faithful in generosity to the work of God to the work of the gospel but never will Jesus make a transaction of quote quote per call about you give to me and then I'll bless you.

Jesus doesn't need your money and he doesn't make such transactions. He gives liberally. He gives to all those who are poor in spirit who come to him.

[13:37] Beware of those who would try to trade the grace and love of God for trinkets. Apostle James said this in his epistle pure and undefiled religion before God the father is this to look after orphans and widows in their distress.

That's what pure religion undefiled religion looks like. That's not what these tribes are doing. And Jesus says again that for pretense they make long prayers.

The matter is not really about the length of their prayers. It's not good or bad. That's not what Jesus is saying. Rather he's accusing them, these false teachers, of empty religiosity.

Their long prayers is just a pretense. It's just for show. It's part of their sham! But Jesus sees their heart.

He knows that for all their religious trappings, their whitewashed tombs, that's what Jesus called them. They're all pretty and clean on the outside, but they're rotten on the inside.

[14:58] And so we see the progression of actually this old chapter from chapter 11 of Mark all the way to chapter 13. But we see the progression here.

Jesus continues his rejection of old Israel. Remember in chapter 11 he had cursed the fig tree which in reality the fig tree is a symbol of the corruption of the temple and he cursed it that it would not bear any more fruit.

He cursed it for not bearing fruit and he says it will not bear any more fruit and it withered. He now pronounced! the greater judgment on the teachers of sacred!

Israel. Jesus says of them they will receive the greater condemnation. He pronounced their condemnation that it will be greater because they know the good from evil and yet they chose to reject God.

They chose to reject the good. They chose to reject God's messenger, God's Messiah, God's chose to live outside the will of God and to rest on their own righteousness.

[16 : 19] It's a warning for us. It's a warning for me as a minister of the gospel, but it's a warning for all of us, brothers and sisters in Christ, as ministers of the gospel.

I don't know if you see yourself as such, but you bear the light of Christ. You are to be faithful to him. You know the good from the bad.

You are to be faithful to him. You are to be messengers, ambassadors of Christ in the world. So here's a warning, particularly a warning for leadership and for those who lead in the church.

Mark now continues this scene that we have in verse 41 to 44. We now see Jesus as it is at the entrance to one of the gates of the temple.

And he sat down among the treasury, we're told, in verse 41, and watched the people put in money into the offering box. And many rich people put in large sums, we're told.

[17 : 28] Now, this is what it would have looked like. Around the temple, there were about 13 different such offering boxes that are all over around the temple, probably in one particular section they are in.

And people can come and give the temple tax, but also there's a place where they can also give offerings, other offerings, into this offering box. And you have to know that in those days there is no such thing as paper bills that we have today.

Right? If you put in \$100, no one would know. It's a paper bill, it's quiet, it goes down. But these offering boxes, they're not actually wooden boxes, they're metal, they're called trumpets, because they have sort of a cone shape.

And then when you dump the coins in, what would happen? Make a lot of noise. money. And so all these rich people coming in, ostentatious, coming in and bringing their large sums.

And you can imagine as they bring, the bigger the donation is, the more noise it makes, and the more people around as they walk around the temple will look like, oh man, that guy's generous. Look at how much he gives.

[18 : 40] He's giving \$50,000 to the capital fund. Right? That's great. And so that's the show.

Jesus is watching, Jesus is sitting there with his disciples, watching all of this. He's seeing it. Mark tells us, many rich people put in large sums.

And Jesus saw that. And then Jesus saw something else. This poor widow, who came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.

Now, that's a mite. Now, a day's wage in Jesus' day is a denarius. A day's wage is a denarius. A mite is one sixty-fourth of a denarius.

There will have to be, she will have to come about 50 times almost to give the amount of a day's wage. That's the amount she gives. It's so minuscule.

[19 : 46] So small. The mite is the smallest currency. It's the smallest denomination. It's like someone coming and bringing, what's the smallest currency? Now, they're a penny, right?

What can you do with two pennies? You can't even buy anything with two pennies, right? It's almost as if that's what she's done yet. She's come and she's given, how much sound do you think two measly pennies will have made when she dropped it down the offering box, the trumpet, the cone shaped box?

Nothing. She will have just walked slowly by it, put it in, and off she goes. No one would have noticed her. No one saw her. No one heard of her great gifts.

She's a forgotten person among the crowd. She's not like the rich people who comes and dumps their large sum and makes the cacophony of noise as they go down into the box.

But someone saw her. Her Lord saw her. Jesus saw her. And Jesus points her out to the rest of the people, to his disciples.

[20 : 57] And I think there's a crowd around. So it's not just the 12, I think, in this. In view here, Jesus points this woman out. And he called his disciples to him, we're told, and Mark, and said to them, Amen, Amen.

That means truly. And when Jesus says that, he wants them to pay close attention. Verily, truly, I say to you, listen up. Jesus is saying to them, truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more

than all those who are contributing to the offering box.

This is one of those things that Jesus says and his disciples just look at him like, what? Because they saw what Jesus saw.

They probably didn't even see, they probably missed it. But they know that whatever that, they didn't hear anything when she put something in there. what do you mean she's put in more than everybody else?

Don't you see that great, you know, noble scribe that came along and emptied that bag and all the noise that made? What do you mean that she's put in more than all who were contributing?

[22:09] That's how Jesus weighed as he saw all of this. This poor widow with her two mites is put in more than all those who have come, the rich people who have come in their large sums, were contributing to the offering box.

She's put in more. What kind of math is this? And Jesus says, they all contributed out of their abundance.

She contributed out of her poverty. She's put out of her poverty. She's put everything she had, all she had to live on, she's put it in. And so this chapter ends with this observation of this widow.

She's given a tiny amount in contrast to the large sums that the riches have given. But Jesus still commends her over and above the contributions of the wealthy.

They give a proportion out of their abundance. She's given everything she has. And she says that's more than all of their contribution combined. she, this widow, has grabbed the principle of God's economy to give wholeheartedly, to give out of a heart of gratitude, to give out of love for God, to give trusting in God.

[23:48] God's And this is why Jesus mocks her out. But it seems like this passage is about stewardship, and we're meant to just look at the generous abandon given of this widow.

But it's more than that, if we look closer. this passage is also warning, because it follows Jesus' indictment of the scribes.

It's a warning against the unfaithful stewardship of the scribes and Pharisees, isn't it? It's a warning against the unfaithfulness of the temple authorities.

What did we say they were? They were the shepherds of Israel. Part of the giving in the temple is to go towards what?

To care for the widows and orphans. And yet this poor widow comes with all she had and gave all of it for the temple.

[25:02] Whereas the shepherds of Israel are praying P-R-E-Y praying on the people. Their woes in sheep's clothing devouring the people devouring the widows.

And Jesus sees this. And Jesus sees this woman's great faith. But he also sees the corruption all around him. He's been looking at it. He's been seeing all around for days now as he goes in and out of the temple.

And Jesus says this is an indictment on Israel on their faithless stewardship of what God has given them.

And it is a warning for us. Right? It's a warning for us here at Holy Trinity. It's a warning for vestry, the vestry of this church, to the budget committee, to the leaders of this church.

how do we steward that which God has given us? To what end do we use the resources that God has given us? Do we want to be faithful stewards to shepherd and to care for the people of God and to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world?

[26:19] To care for the widows and orphans and the fatherless? Or do we care about padding the wealth of the church and making sure our bank account keeps increasing is that saving it up for a rainy day.

Do we trust God? Do we trust God to be wise, right? Discerning about the use of the money? I'm grateful that we have people in this church who do so.

But do we also trust God to use those things that God has given us to the end for which God has given it? The advancement of his kingdom. Where?

What's our economy? How do we do the math in the church of Christ? It's easy. It's easy to be like the world.

That's what these scribes are. They think worldly. They're all about their bellies. But Jesus says true faith, faithful stewardship looks like that of this lowly widow.

[27:30] And there's lessons we need to learn. We all have something to give as the people of God. It's not just money, is it? It's just our talents, our gifts, our resources, our time.

We all, all of us here have something to give to the work of the ministry, to the work of the gospel. None of us are exempt. We've been given so much.

And so we have much to give. We all have something to give. We say it every day when we bring the offerings, collect the offerings. We say this, all things come of thee, O Lord.

All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee. That cannot just be something we say with our lips. We must believe it. It is all God's. It is his gifts.

It is his blessing. And not just the money, but even the gifts he's given us, the talents he's given us. It all is from God and it's meant to be used for his glory.

[28:32] So we all have something to give. And how are we to give it? We must give it out of a heart of gratitude. We must not be like the scribes who make a show of their giving.

Who think because they give more than others in the church. They're more important. And their say-so matters more. And they use their giving as a way to hold others in the church hostage.

You must not be like that. You must give out of gratitude. You must give recklessly like this widow does. Like the widow of Zarephod did in reading as well.

You must be willing to give recklessly. Why recklessly? Because we trust in the God to whom we're given. We trust what he says in Isaiah that even to your old age I am he and to gray years I am he that will carry you.

I have made and I will bear you up. I will carry you and I will save you. We must trust that this is our good shepherd and what he says he will do concerning us. We need as the people of God not to measure people's contributions in the church of Christ through worldly eyes.

[29:53] And if we do see the economy of Jesus here it would allow us to appreciate one another and all our giftings in the church. Because if we give out of gratitude out of selflessness out of love for God we then can appreciate all each other's contributions.

I'm not meant to look at you and say well you know well she just does the coffee I teach a Bible study I mean anyone can do coffee that guy just comes in once a week and sweep the floor I lead the music and we put a sort of Iraq here on the order of our contributions no we give out of gratitude we give all that God has given us and we give out of we appreciate all the contributions because it is all going to the up building of the body of Christ and lastly we look to Jesus as we do so as we give we look to Jesus who gave his all for us though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich that's your

Lord he gave all for you and so you can in turn give your all to him let us pray fix our hearts on you oh God in pure devotion that the vain pursuits of this world may have no hold over us and that we may be changed by the consuming fire of the Holy Spirit into the image and likeness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord to whom with you and the same Spirit be all honor and glory world without end Amen