

“The Widow’s Mite”
25th Sunday after Pentecost – Nov. 11, 2018 – Mark 12:38-44

I have always liked the artist Louis Glanzman’s rendering of the Widow that is on our bulletin cover today. This year, I wondered: what if she were young and had smooth skin. What if there were a baby on her hip or children clinging to her skirt? What if just looking at her made her a tragic widow? How would that change the story you hear, plus the one you tell yourself about her circumstances? Is the elderly (we assume) widow in our story today intended to be a model of good stewardship, a symbol of **hope** or a picture of **despair**? And how do we go about finding out? Well, it’s really simple. We need to ask questions. To see what needs seeing, keep putting the story into your life (and learning,) and in addition, try putting yourself into the story and ask whatever questions YOU might ask as a character in it.

For example, last Sunday Pastor Anteneh did both in his telling of the Raising of Lazarus: The Story in you says *Death stings*; and even Jesus got angry at Death. This might be what you learned from letting the story into your life. But being a part of the story means hearing Jesus say, “unbind him” to you. And what would that mean? Well, it might mean we might need to touch a dead man; or, we might need to unwrap his death shroud; to get dirty, to be ritually unclean. It might mean we need to be prepared to do work we don’t know how to do; or be called to do things we’ve never been called on to do before. And if we’re willing, a Lazarus mindset might help us see what Jesus sees.

Today’s Gospel, The Widow in the Temple, used to be titled, The Widow’s Mite, as if the story was all about two small copper coins – and had little to do with the main character, an unnamed widow. Jesus is in Jerusalem to finish his teaching, and his life. It is the festival of Passover. He is in the Temple, and he’s been responding to questions from religious leadership:

- +On taxation - from **Herodians**, who were puppets of Rome;
- +On wives in the afterlife – from **Sadducees**, who didn’t believe in resurrection , and
- +On the commandments - from **Scribes** whose job was to interpret The Law.

Finally, having had enough hypocrisy, Jesus sits down to watch crowd. A woman comes in to the women’s area to offer 2 small coins (lepta). Now, you’ve probably heard stewardship sermons on the magnitude of this gift, and how giving all you have to live on is the model of faithfulness. But for me, it’s not really about *how much* the widow offered, it’s about *why* she was offering in first place. For you see, in the time of the Temple, widows were exempt.

She and her husband had probably come to the festival many times. It had felt so good for them to be able to bring their tithes to Temple. But those days were gone. Her husband was gone. She has no name, and apparently no other resources. Yet, she came to give all she had; knowing that people would stare. And it was Passover - celebrating freedom from slavery – so she came. But my question remains, if her Passover offering was not required, so why did she bother?

Maybe to help other widows, for that was the Temple’s job

Maybe as a gesture of thanksgiving for better days

Maybe it was (*per Abraham Lincoln*) “the last full measure of devotion.”

Or maybe because it was who she was; how she did her life.

Christianity was born as a powerless movement as opposed to the power of Rome. The ancient world operated on a shame/honor system that *if you do good, you get good; if you do bad, you get bad*. Thus, the religious leaders desired to be honored and respected, indicating to all that they had found favor with God. This widow had little or nothing to show: no money, no husband, **nothing**, which shouted: Here is a woman who has not found favor with God. So, why come to a Temple that had forgotten its purpose to serve? Because she was one of the Children of Israel, one of God’s chosen people called to reform the culture; chosen to be light in the darkness, chosen to be different from the world. That’s what Hannah sang about in the Hebrew Scriptures, and what Mary

sang in the Magnificat as a response to Gabriel's visit. It's what Jesus proclaimed in his first sermon at Nazareth: *The lowly will be lifted up; the rich will be sent away empty*. Wealth and status are to be a shared endeavor in community of God's people.

Once I brought a small bag of quarters to Preschool Chapel Time. We took them all out and counted together 1, 2, 3...up to 10. I then asked a volunteer if they would like to share my quarters with me, and what might be the best way to share them? "Five for me and five for you!" said one. "One for me, then one for you until they're gone," said another. We decided it would be the most fair to split them 50/50. I then asked for another volunteer and told them that I was now going to pretend to be God, and that God wanted to share the quarters with them. Then I handed all ten quarters to my volunteer. "Is that fair?" I asked. They didn't think so. So I took one quarter back. "How about now?" Nope. Not fair. "So how about, I keep this one quarter, and let you have the 9 others, and you do something for me?" Curiosity got the better of them. "How about you take some of the 9 quarters and share the rest with those around you who don't have any?" Would that be fair? We all agreed it would be, as long as the volunteer agreed to not keep all the quarters, but promised to share what had been freely given to us.

The widow (obviously) had little or nothing to show or share, no money, no husband, no one to care for her; which shouted: *Here is a woman who has not found favor with God*. Yet, she came to the Temple to give an unnecessary offering. WHY? Maybe it was simply because on this day, during the Passover celebration of freedom from slavery, she **would** find favor with God. For on this day, she was in the company of the One who would raise her from death and those who would unbind her Hope - she was in the company of Jesus of Nazareth. Amen.

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Resources: Don Salier, AGO convention homily 7/6/18; *Sermon Brainwave*; Karoline Lewis for *Working Preacher.com*