

SERMON NOVEMBER 10 2024 “A Poor Widow, A Rich Bride”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by, and for Christ Jesus, Jerusalem was crowded. It was almost the Passover, and people came from all over for the Feast.

And the faithful made their way to the Temple, which never failed to impress. They were like tourists visiting Chicago walking around with faces to the sky, impressed by all the skyscrapers and amazed at their dizzying heights.

So it was at the Temple that day as they got in line to give their offerings. The temple had thirteen metal tubes that flared out at the end, like trumpets; or like hands begging, crying for a handout.

When one put money into them, they clanged as the coins went down the tubes and into the boxes at the end.

Jesus watched as all kinds of people made all kinds of offerings. Mark doesn't tell us how long Jesus stayed, though it must have been for some time if He saw many put in large sums.

The large deposits of the rich made lots of noise. And they seemed pleased at that. After all, they must be upstanding, righteous folks for God to have abundantly blessed them.

So why did Jesus stay? Didn't he have better things to do this last week of his life? What was He waiting and watching for?

At last, a poor widow came and made her offering. It didn't take her long.

Her two small copper coins disappeared down the chute and were lost in the large pile of coins at the bottom, just as she was lost in the great crowd of pilgrims.

Except Jesus noticed her. Had He been waiting for her? He didn't speak to her, didn't heal her, or give her anything.

But He speaks to His disciples. He wanted them to notice her, too. It was easy to notice the rich, strong, and able, but for Jesus, compassion, not admiration, was of critical importance.

Maybe He wanted them to help her. Like that day when there were 5,000 families who'd come to hear Him teach. He told His disciples to give them something to eat. They said they couldn't.

Alright, then. Here is a single poor widow, who just **put in everything she had, all she had to live on**. Can you help her? Will you preach the good news to her? **PAUSE**

In the first part of our text, Mark tells us that the scribes noticed widows like her—to **devour** their houses.

They had no source of income, they were scholars, so they sought help from wherever they could obtain it.

Not openly and obviously, of course. For then, their greed would have been exposed, and they would have had to give up

the best seats at feasts and the admiration of the folks who greeted them in the marketplace.

But when the opportunity presented itself . . . **well, God helps those who help themselves**, right?

The scribes were good at looking religious and praying, even while preying upon widows. Perhaps **that's why this widow** in our text-only had two small copper coins to offer.

So Jesus points her out to the disciples. Was it a test? Here is someone who needs mercy. Is Jesus trying to tell them. . . **do you get it yet? Be merciful as I've shown you mercy.**

Well, we're not told what happened. But given the disciples' track record, we can probably safely assume they didn't.

Do we? Maybe this story isn't so much about generous giving as it is about showing mercy. Or maybe the two go together. Or perhaps it's not about offerings at all, but God's providence.

These last weeks of the Church Year turn our attention to the world's last days. We are surely in them, for he could return in judgment any day since Jesus ascended. No one knows the day or hour, not even Jesus, only the Father.

But maybe that's the thing. God always wants to always be ready, to understand that we're always in the last days. Why? So we'll remember that this - this world and life - is not all there is.

So that we'll look for Him. And remember that whatever we've done for the least of these my brothers, we've done for our Lord Jesus. **PAUSE**

I said at the start of this sermon that it was almost Passover, but what I didn't say is that it was nearly time for *Jesus'* Passover - the time for His passing over from life to death and back to life.

You see, this story takes place during His last days. The clock was ticking. He knew he'd soon be dying on the cross.

So why take the time to sit in the Temple and notice a poor widow? Surely there were other, more important things He could or should be doing, right? That's how we think.

But Jesus is always noticing those the world takes little notice of. Children, widows, orphans, lepers, the poor.

And He doesn't just notice them, He spends time with them, eats with them, speaks with them, forgives them.

Which is Good News for us. If you are somebody the world notices now, how long will it last until you're forgotten, too?

How long before you're no longer useful so that you're living in a Nursing Home, pushed aside by the go-getters.

Like a widow with only two small copper coins . . .

But Jesus notices her faithful offering. She who was poor in material things was rich in faith. But the story's point isn't that she was generous, but that God is.

Yes the woman's generosity in the midst of poverty was impressive, but who'd provided her with the faith to offer it? God had.

That's the main point here. As much as we'd like to focus on the human actors, the point of all the parables was to reveal something about the Kingdom of God.

In this case, his providence showed her that it was okay to let go of what she had in this world because God would provide.

But what is most important to see is that God saw her faith and knew she wouldn't be a poor widow much longer. He'd come to save her and all the faithful. His mind was on her even when He is about to die; for He died on the cross for her. And for you.

On the cross, who does Jesus notice? The thief hanging next to Him, His mother beneath Him. Even those who were taunting him and He provides for them.

In like manner, He is never too busy for you. He never has no more important things to do than to show mercy.

And the proof of that is that in his gracious mercy, He is about to give all He has, His very life, for us.

So, today Jesus had another lesson for His disciples. And you. **Beware of the scribes**, Jesus tells them. Not just because of what they were doing, but because of what they had become.

For they had become quite worldly. Concerned with themselves, their appearance, honor, and wealth.

And so they had little room for mercy. It is easy to criticize them. How easy is it for us to become like them? **PAUSE**

As the hymn says, ***the bridegroom soon will call us, come to the wedding feast.***

On that great and glorious day, the trumpets will not be used for receiving offerings but for announcing our Savior's return to receive his people into his eternal presence.

And on that day, those wedded to the world will become widows as this world passes away.

But for those now widowed by the world and waiting for the bridegroom - for them, and for us a feast begins that has no end.

So that day in the Temple, you tell me: who were really the poor ones, and who was the rich one? The widow was rich, for in faith and trust, she knew that the Lord would provide.

The end of the church year reminds us that we are living in the last days, so we need to hold on to the things of this world a little less and hold on to our bridegroom a little more.

It's time to notice ourselves a little less and see those in need of mercy a little more.

And not to worry so much about the world's approval, that they notice us - and focus a little more on the good news that Jesus notices you.

He is not too busy, and you are not too small for Him even if you only have two small copper coins to offer.

But you have much more than that! For all the money in the world, you can't purchase your ticket to heaven.

You have been baptized and redeemed not with gold or silver but with the blood of the Son of God - a payment worth much more than all the gold and silver in the world.

And you are forgiven all your sins - all of them, not just some of them. Nothing is between you and your bridegroom; not even death can part you.

And you are fed not with the oil and flour that never run out, as Elijah's widow was, but with the Body and Blood of Jesus which will never run out.

That you eat not just for many days, like Elijah's widow, or even as many days as you live on this earth, but forever.

For while the widow put her two small copper coins, all she had, into the Temple's offering trumpet, Jesus puts His two things, His Body and Blood, all He has, into you.

The pledge, the promise of His forgiveness, is that He is coming back for you.

So that day in the Temple, the rich widow who looked poor put in all she had. While those who are rich in the eyes of the world, those wealthy gave only a tenth.

Yet King Jesus, the church's bridegroom, saw His faithful bride and knew that because He was going to offer all He had on the cross, so she and all the faith would be united with Christ our bridegroom forever. AMEN.