

1 Sermon, January 26, 2014

Text: Mark 12:38-13:2, Isaiah 58:3-10

Title: "The story of the Love of God: The Widow's Offering"

1. Jesus *noticed* the poor widow – where many would not have
2. Jesus was grateful for her generous impulse
3. Jesus was angry at those who devour widow's houses –
4. Jesus was frustrated with those who pay attention to the glories of the temple, and don't see the poverty in front of them
5. Make a personal connection with someone less fortunate than you

1. Jesus *noticed* the poor widow – where many would not have

Today's reading from the Gospel of Mark is a sandwich of three parts. In the first part, Jesus criticizes the scribes who devour widow's houses. A house might be the major asset that a widow might have in those days, so to take away a widow's house was to impoverish her.

Jesus didn't like that.

The second part is Jesus noticing something. He noticed that there were many people adding to the temple treasury. Some wealthy people were probably making a big deal out of it.

There were, in this part of the temple, thirteen metal offering chests into which people could put their coins. These thirteen chests were narrow at the mouth and wide at the bottom, shaped like trumpets.

Of these offering chests, nine were for specific kinds of offerings due by worshippers. The other four were for strictly voluntary gifts, used for relief of the poor.

Jesus noticed the wealthy putting in bags of coins, and then he notice a poor widow, who came along and put in two small copper coins. Jesus estimated it was all she had to live on.

But Jesus' disciples eyes weren't on the poor widow that Jesus pointed out. They said, ""Teacher, look at these beautiful stones and wonderful buildings!"

Jesus replied: "You may think these buildings are huge and everlasting, but they will all be torn down."

It's quite a sandwich, with the poor widow caught in between the scribes who devour widows' houses, and the only seeming permanence of the great building they were in.

2 Sermon, January 26, 2014

I want to talk about that widow, and what Jesus thought of her.

The first thing is that Jesus *noticed* her. Most people wouldn't have paid her any attention, their eyes on the rich robes of the scribes and Pharisees. But Jesus paid attention to her. Jesus noticed the poor and the suffering, the ones who were blind and had to shout out because they couldn't get to Jesus, the one who just touched the fringe of his cloak because she didn't feel worthy of his attention, the one who had to climb a tree to see Jesus because he was so short.

Jesus noticed the poor, the suffering, the sick.

2. Jesus was grateful for her generous impulse

The second thing that Jesus remarked upon was her generosity. He said she gave more than any of the others, because she gave all she had. It didn't make any sense that she would give away all she had to live on, unless she was mentally ill, or was preparing to die.

Even though it made no sense, she gave.

Jesus praised her generosity.

But it would be a mistake to say that this was simply a lesson on generosity from Jesus. Jesus, steeped in the Old Testament writings knew that the Old Testament repeatedly urged Jews to take care of the widow and the orphan. So a widow, for Jesus, ought to have someone looking after her. Jesus did not see anyone doing so.

So the widow was not only the object of Jesus' praise, but also his deep concern.

3. Jesus was angry at those who devour widow's houses –

Jesus, when he criticized the scribes who devour widow's houses, was criticizing an unjust economic system where a very few are fabulously wealthy at the expense of widows and others who were vulnerable.

It is not too different in our time.

In the case of widows, many widows don't report the death of their husband to the credit card company, because they found out that a dead man's credit is better than a live woman's,

3 Sermon, January 26, 2014

A married woman who fails to establish credit in her own name can be in a tight spot after her husband dies. A widow on a fixed income has it especially tough. Her solo income may place her below the threshold required for many credit cards.

In our community there are people who turn off the hot water heater because they can't afford it. There are many who use the food pantry, and most of these are not repeaters. There are people whose medical insurance doesn't cover the medicine they need, and so their health grows worse. I know one woman who had to go off her medicine for a bipolar condition because of insurance issues, and it's taken most of a year to get back to a stable way of life.

There are people who cannot afford to repair their car, and struggle to get rides to work. There are a number of families who have lost their homes because they've lost their jobs, and had a period of unemployment. Then, when they got new jobs it was for less pay than before. There are some who don't come to church some Sundays because they can't afford to put anything in the offering plate.

And there are those of us who just don't see it, who don't think about it, who are too busy to notice who is suffering.

In Deuteronomy 10 Israel was reminded:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, 18who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. 19You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

John the Baptist said in Luke: "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Luke 3:11, NRSV.

In order to do that, you have to realize that your neighbor needs a coat, or needs food.

4. Jesus was frustrated with those who pay attention to the glories of the temple, and don't see the poverty in front of them

Yes, Jesus wanted his disciples to start *seeing* the poor.

4 Sermon, January 26, 2014

That's why he was so frustrated when they looked at the glories of the majestic temple building, instead of seeing the people near them who were suffering.

Jesus didn't go to the temple for a vacation – to see pretty buildings. Jesus went to the temple because his people were there. Jesus didn't like a lot of what went on in the temple, especially the money-changing. But Jesus went and taught in the temple, because that's where the people were.

5. Make a personal connection with someone less fortunate than you

That's what happened with Jesus. What does Jesus want us to be doing?

Well, I think that Jesus wants us to start seeing people in poverty. That means that, if you are a person who has comfortable means, your soul would benefit greatly if you make friends with someone far less fortunate than you. You would learn a new perspective, and more than that, you would find yourself blessed.

A woman friend of mine made friends with a woman in prison. She was there for her friend when her friend was released from prison, and through the difficulties of finding housing, finding a job, getting bank accounts, etc. This friend of mine continues to be deeply enriched by the experience. It has raised a whole lot of questions for her, but it had resulted in her being more happy and more aware.

I am enriched by spending time with those who are struggling, whether it's economic, or facing death from disease, or recovering from a bad relationship. Each of us can be enriched by spending time with those whom we think of when we say, "It could be worse."

Thanks be to God. Amen.

5 Sermon, January 26, 2014

Mark 12:38-13:2

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

38 As Jesus was teaching, he said:

Guard against the teachers of the Law of Moses! They love to walk around in long robes and be greeted in the market. 39 They like the front seats in the meeting places and the best seats at banquets. 40 But they cheat widows out of their homes and pray long prayers just to show off. They will be punished most of all.

41 Jesus was sitting in the temple near the offering box and watching people put in their gifts. He noticed that many rich people were giving a lot of money. 42 Finally, a poor widow came up and put in two coins that were worth only a few pennies. 43 Jesus told his disciples to gather around him. Then he said:

I tell you that this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 44 Everyone else gave what they didn't need. But she is very poor and gave everything she had. Now she doesn't have a cent to live on.

13 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Teacher, look at these beautiful stones and wonderful buildings!"

2 Jesus replied, "Do you see these huge buildings? They will certainly be torn down! Not one stone will be left in place."