

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church

The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost: November 10, 2024

Scribes, Widows, Jesus and Coins

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the Twenty Fifth Sunday after Pentecost. I also want to thank all veterans for their service as we come into Veteran's Day on Monday. "Thank you for your service, and may God bless you."

So, today we have a Gospel story about a widow and coins. Yet just prior to the widow in our Gospel selection there is a warning about scribes, and the elite taking advantage of the poor. What is the main point Mark is trying to make here? Why are these two short paragraphs hooked together – one about watching out for the scribes, and one about a poor widow putting her entire meager living into the treasury? Could there be more than one valid way to interpret this passage? And if so, which interpretation applies to us today? If you had to offer your two cents worth, what would you say?

Is this scripture telling us we are being called into **sacrificial living**, not just **sacrificial giving**? If we look more closely, we can see that giving like the widow means contributing to a systemic problem: the poor give everything they have for the sake of the rich and those who keep them oppressed. Neither Jesus nor God ever intended for the rich to get richer on the backs of the poor.

It's quite possible Jesus that points out the widow as an *example* of what he's just been talking about: beware of the scribes who devour widows' houses so they can go around in long robes and claim places of honor for themselves. The more you think about this interpretation, it might explain why Mark hooks these two paragraphs together here, as one illustrates the other.

Instead of holding up the poor widow as virtuous by comparing her to the wealthy people who give out of their abundance, Jesus might be trying to help us see that both sides of the equation

are wrong. Both the poor widow and the wealthy scribes who devour their houses are examples of a corrupt and broken system.

Jesus didn't come just to *put a bandage on* our brokenness; he came to *heal* it. Jesus came to usher in a whole new system, a whole new way of living together as children of God. But that means opening our eyes, seeing what is in front of us. Admitting brokenness. It means living in the world but not of it.

Our country stands at a time when a lot of us are unsure of how we will move forward. Some may be excited and thrilled while others are anxious and worried. But if we are really honest with ourselves, a lot of our systems have been broken for a long time, and this is why today's Gospel is so relevant.

It leaves us asking: where can you invest yourself? How can you contribute to God's purpose and mission? We may not think those coins amount to much. Sometimes our faith doesn't amount to much, either. But if it's all we have, how can we make sure we don't squander that gift?

You may be wondering if you matter at all. You may be wondering if the little bit you have is enough.

David Lose, a Lutheran pastor, offers us another way to look at this passage from Mark's gospel. Lose points out that perhaps the focus of this story is not so much on the scribes or the rich or the poor widow, but on what *Jesus does*:

What does Jesus do? He *sees* this widow. Among all the people putting money into the Temple treasury, Jesus *notices her*.

Lose writes, "And whatever it is that he wants his disciples to learn from her, perhaps the first lesson is simply to notice her. To see her. To acknowledge her person, her being, her plight, and her offering. She is not, in the end, an object lesson, but a person. Easily unseen, even invisible, yet worthy of Jesus' attention, and ours."

Hear that again, “worthy of Jesus’ attention and ours.” As we move forward wrapping up our stewardship season, getting those forms turned in, don’t worry about what others think, or what others give. Don’t worry if you want to try a new ministry, reading, or hosting, or the other vast array of help we need, and we all make mistakes - but remember God sees you.

And please know, no matter how you feel about this country at this moment, realize that the very scripture you hold dear as God’s word to you, contains a savior who did not live in a eutopia, but one who lived under Roman occupation. He wasn’t well-liked, nor popular, but he so loved the world he gave his everything.

We are called through our faith to continue our work supporting justice and equality. We are called to love "the other", we are called to follow Jesus, and we are called to stand true and see the world as it is, and hopefully leave it in better shape than when we came.

But it isn’t just the future that calls us to hope. Jesus calls us *right now* to see the widow, and to recognize her deepest need. It’s the same need we all have. We need to be cared for in a way that only God can care for us, to be loved in a way that only God can love us. To be seen as only Christ can see us.

I believe Christ the Lord Church lives out the Gospel; I believe we see each other. I believe for all our weirdness that we are followers of Jesus, and this is a good place to invest your time, talent, and money.

Christianity was never meant to be the huge gigantic economic monster that it has become. Our political systems were never meant to accommodate all the changes that have happened in the world. But we as a small community can continue to strive to follow Jesus and provide support for each other.

I leave you with this.

"All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

Amen