

“Sharing What We Have”

Mark 12: 38-44

We are all pretty familiar with this text. We have heard this text used as part of stewardship campaigns. We have heard this text used when giving is falling behind the church budget. And I bet we all thought that is what we were going to hear again today. Well, I'm here to tell you that I am not here to preach a stewardship campaign sermon or to ask you to give more, probably much to the Finance committee's chagrin.

What I am inviting us all to do today is to hear again the story of the widow's mite anew and to really see what is going on in the text. In our text today, we find Jesus sitting with his disciples and they are people watching. They are watching people come into the Temple where the treasury is and they are watching the people give their offering. They see people making grand displays when they give their offering and they watch as people quickly toss their coins into the treasury. Jesus and the disciples are people watching. All morning this group has been people watching and like any good teacher, Jesus uses their observations as a teaching moment.

And so he turns to them and says, “Now, we've been watching the scribes, the leaders of the church coming in and giving their offerings. We've seen them in

their fancy robes. We've heard them teaching about the law and what God wants from God's people. All morning, we've heard their long prayers. And from all appearances' sake, it looks like they are faithful people who truly understand being in relationship with God.

And while we've been observing their religious behavior all morning, we've also observed that they have forgotten the greatest commandment. This morning while in the temple, our fine church leaders have said beautiful prayers but then once they have leave the temple, they go and take advantage of the widows by taking all their money and their houses just so their own pockets can be lined with riches. Sure they claim it is for the Temple but really do you think God wants the church to take someone's last two coins just so the offering gets paid, just so the sacrifice to God is made? Disciples, do you think God really wants people to go into poverty just so the sacrifices to God can be carried out this week?

See look, here comes a widow. No one notices her but she is coming forward and puts in her two coins. That's a lot of money for her, in fact that may be all she has and she has given it to the Temple. But what is she going to do now? She has no money. What is she going to use to buy food? Who is going to help her out?

Disciples, do you really think God is requiring her to give all her money to the Temple just so it can be noted that she paid her offering this week? Where's the care for others? Where's the care for humanity? Where's the God that we know and claim, a God of love, a God of justice, a God of mercy if that is true?

as the disciples pondered these questions, they flashed back to just a few days ago when Jesus came into the Temple yard and overturned the money tables. They remembered how mad he got when he saw that the acts that were design to show faithfulness to God had been turned into money-making schemes through hiked-up prices and triple interest. They remembered him becoming so angry that he flipped over the tables and scattered the animals. The disciples remembered Jesus saying that the House of God had been turned into a house of thieves.

And then as they continued to ponder these questions, the disciples also remembered that just a few days ago, a scribe and Jesus had a discussion about riches and living out God's love in our lives. the question was asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" And Jesus had replied love your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and second, love your neighbor as yourself. And the scribed had agreed with Jesus, even going on to say that these things were more important than any offering or sacrifice to God. Loving God and loving neighbor comes first and is more important than any offering or sacrifice.

And the disciples remembered that Jesus had told the scribe that he is not far from the kingdom of God.

So now as the the disciples were remembering all these events and all these sayings as they pondered Jesus' questions, they couldn't help but ask themselves: Does God really require someone's last two coins just because an offering must be paid? Well, no. What God does require is that all of God's children grow in faith, grow in relationship with God, and care for one another.

What our God does require from God's children is that we love God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength and to love one another as we love ourselves.

And it is out of this love of God, and out of this love for others, that our practices of faith come forward as ways to deepen our relationship with God and with one another. They are not requirements of faith but grow out of a life of faith. They are ways for us to experience and share God's goodness and grace with other people.

And it is in that moment that Jesus shared with the disciples one of the great lessons in faith, that as followers of Jesus Christ, all our actions, and all of our words should be grounded in our love for God and that we as the church, as the Body of Christ here on earth have a huge responsibility to be stewards of justice,

hope, and peace, not stewards of lists, sacrifices, and thievery. And as we embrace this calling, in response, we as the church are to struggle with some hard questions, questions that require us to look deep inside, and ask, do our practices hurt or help the children of God?

Today, The author of Mark is asking us to hold up the widow's offering like a mirror and to see our practices of faith reflected back. The widow's offering has given us a chance to reflect on why we do the things we do as church. It has given us the opportunity to remember that all of our practices, that all of our disciplines, that all of our missions, that all of our traditions are ways to deepen our relationship with God, not motions to simply go through as people of faith or ways to create injustice or separation.

For Mark, the story of the widow's offering forces us as people of faith to ask ourselves the question of why we do the practices and traditions that we do in church? Do we do them because we think they are what God requires? Or do we do them because they are grounded in the love of God and in the love of our neighbor and they deepen our relationship with God?

As Jesus and the disciples continued to watch the people come in and give their offerings, Jesus reminded the disciples that we are not called to go about the "busyness of church", but to be about the business of church of being a voice for

the voiceless, making justice for the oppressed, sharing the wealth of God's love, and living out a faith that is grounded in the abundance of God's grace.

While Jesus was sitting there with the disciples, people watching, he was showing them that the House of God had become a place where the people did not come to celebrate the God who delivered them from Egypt, who freed them from bondage, who claimed them as God's own. He showed them that the House of God had become a place where people were simply going through the motions, where the people of God failed to understand the meaning behind their practices, where the people of God had become so "invested in the business of 'running the church' and making a success of it that [they] actually thought God would require the very last two coins from a widow and would leave her with nothing.

That morning in the Temple, Jesus was showing the disciples that God had come to them-The Word made Flesh- but the leaders of the church ignored him . Jesus was showing the disciples that God had come to God's children, in human form, but they looked past the presence of God in their midst. Jesus was showing the disciples that God had come to the leaders of the church, The Word made Flesh, but the Temple was so trapped in the business of God, in interpreting the law for their own gain, and forgetting that all God requires is that one love God with all one's heart, with all one's mind, and with all one's strength and to love

one's neighbors as oneself that they missed the new beginning, the new order, the new relationship found in Jesus Christ, the very presence of God in their midst.

That is why Jesus lifts up the widow's offering. Sure it is a sign of faith, sure it is a sign of sacrificial giving but it is also a mirror for us as people of faith, as a community of faith, as the church to see our actions reflected back at us. So by truly understanding the significance of the widow's gift, we can begin to ask ourselves as leaders of the church, as followers of Jesus Christ, do our practices hurt or help God's children?

Because "The Jesus who speaks ...from this text calls [the people of God] to enter anew into the presence of God, a God who drives away the pretensions and conventions of our religious life, a God who asks us to live inside and out of his death and resurrection."

Today Mark asks his readers and us the hard question of why we do the things we do in church: Do our practices become ways to deepen our relationship with God? Are they grounded in loving God and loving our neighbors or are they simply the "business of running the church"? Have we gotten so caught up in beautiful prayers and outside appearances that we have fail to see, the presence of God among us, moving among us, calling us to a new beginning.

Today, the widow's offering is held up like a mirror and our actions are reflected back. And we are reminded that we are called to be the church, the church of love, the church of justice, the church of mercy, the church of grace, not a church filled with stewards of injustice, lists, and the notions that tells everyone to "Give until it hurts."

We are called to be a people who love God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength. We are called to be a people who love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We are called to be a people whose practices of faith find their foundation in the greatest commandment. We are called to be a church where the business of the church is serving God and caring for God's people, not the business of tallies and figures.

May we always remember the widow's offering as we live out the business of the church. Amen