

## Who are you watching? Who is teaching you?

Mark 12:38–44

This week the text is Mark 12:38–44. Jesus says: beware of the behavior of those who seek prestige and take advantage of the vulnerable. Then he watches the crowd give their money and praises a poor widow for giving all she had to live on.

The story of “the widow’s mite,” as it’s often called, is typically cast as a model of sacrificial giving for us all to follow, which is an important part of the message. Having a grateful spirit and a generous attitude are foundational to our faith. But there is more to the story. Jesus observes the world differently than the crowd in the temple who are giving their offerings.

After Jesus condemns the scribes for trampling on the widows while scrambling to gain respect and make an impressive appearance, a widow makes her way up to the treasury and puts in all of her money. We can miss this connection in our reading if we separate Mark 12:38–40 from 12:41–44. But making the link is important because it changes how we understand Jesus’ reaction to the widow. Without the first three verses about the scribes, it can sound like Jesus is only proud that the widow is giving everything she has, which he is. However, making the link shines a light on what the scribes have neglected to do and see. It reminds us that they have not been taking care of her as the scriptures demand. She has been left with only two coins to live on. Making this connection also invites each of us to consider for whom we are called to care, and how.

The widow most likely felt invisible and inconsequential. In Jesus’ day women only existed in relation to their husbands and married sons. A woman alone with money in her control, as this woman was, meant she was a widow with no family to take her in. Powerless and not allowed to contribute to society, she was invisible and prey to those who would take advantage of her.

The widow was not invisible to Jesus. Jesus was watching her and called the disciples to watch and learn from her. Jesus sees what is going on in the temple differently than other onlookers. Jesus sees not only her generosity but what actions helped to create the situation she was in.

The story shows that the widow had been exploited by the religious establishment. Yet she gives her last penny to the temple! But the astounding irony of the situation, Jesus says, is that this widow is actually more faithful, more generous, and more righteous than the pretentious scribes who “say long prayers” and those who give large sums “out of their abundance.” The poor widow, the very one they overlook, outshines them all!

This passage challenges us to reflect on not only how generous we are in our giving, but also focuses on how we might give our time, talent, and treasure to more fully participate in God’s joyous work of lifting up the lowly, scattering the proud, and thus turning the world upside down!

Imagine yourself in the temple that day. Who do you see? Do you even see the widow? Do you see more than the amount the widow puts into the temple treasury? Do you recognize the norms in society that caused her lack of resources? What is God teaching you about having a generous heart?

Jesus sees the poor widow and says, “That’s what I’m after!” Her gift is clearly generous; not in the amount of the gift but in the sacrifice behind it. Jesus says, “All of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” Her giving comes from her heart. Not obligation or guilt or seeking reward.

The place to begin in our giving is to examine our hearts. Do we desire to give God the very best that we have, from all that we have? Do we ask God to help us to see the invisible? Do we want our eyes and hearts to see all of God’s children with the same eyes with which Jesus saw them and with the same love with which Jesus loved them?

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

*Bob*