

November 10, 2019

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**Reading:** Mark 12:38-44

**The Message:** Taking a Chance on the Widow

During WWII, my uncle served on a ship that patrolled the English channel, picking up bomber crews who made it to the channel before being forced to ditch their crippled planes. An important piece of work, saving lives. But not quite exciting enough for his self image, so he appropriated their stories and remembered himself as a bomber pilot who himself ditched in the Channel. I only discovered this after he died, when I found among papers, an article in which he was interviewed and asked my dad about it.

I wished he had reflected on what he actually did, because, to me, his job had value. But in thinking about him, I thought of all the thousands of men, women and youngsters who did the mundane 'support' jobs that weren't dramatic, that didn't win medals. Those who waited for loved ones to come home, for instance. Let's remember them this Remembrance Day.

There is something that touches our hearts when a small act is noticed.

And that is what Jesus did. Jesus is coming to the end of his three years of ministry. He has only two days left until his arrest. What does he do?

He waits for the small act that was hardly noticeable to anyone else.

In the midst of his harsh criticism of the economic and political practices of Roman culture, this little pearl of an observation is set.

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

Jesus is watching the widow in the midst of his critique of the culture.

- a culture that held the estates of widows because they couldn't manage their own estates,
- a culture that was known for abusing the invisible and rewarding those who lorded it over them.

What can we conclude about Jesus' words?

- He notices her; his eyes are open to the **invisible**, the small, the insignificant, the hidden.
- He notices her **courage** - to be there, to let go of her last coins, to face the end with hope.
- Jesus notices her **dignity**, her trust that despite the evidence of those around her, her tiny gift mattered.

And Jesus noticed her vocation. Whether she knew it or not, the widow was a prophet in the sense that her costly offering spoke God's Word in the ancient tradition of Isaiah, Elijah, Jeremiah, and other Hebrew prophets.

But she was also prophetic in another sense, because her self-sacrifice prefigured Jesus'. Perhaps what Jesus noticed was kinship. Her story mirroring his. The widow gave

everything she had to serve a world so broken. Days later, Jesus gave everything he had to redeem, restore, and renew that world.

Jesus shows us that the God we worship cares about this woman and her sacrifice. The God we confess sees her predicament and recognizes the full horror of her distress. This God will not tolerate such abuse. This God exposes a world that makes such sacrifices necessary.

No one would have noticed her if Jesus hadn't.

God sees our struggles, recognizes our challenges and cares about where we are hard pressed to make ends meet.

Even more, God invites us to look around and see each other, those in our community who have lost hope. God is inviting us to see them, to care for them, and to advocate for a system that does not exploit or ignore them.

God believes in us enough to use us to make a difference. God is already here at work; join God's efforts to see those in distress, help them find comfort and relief, and work for a more just world.

Remembrance Day isn't only about the heroes; it's about the foot soldiers in the trenches, the wives waiting for husbands, the widows and the orphans who gave their whole lives. And Remembrance Day isn't about war or winning; it's about waging peace by building justice one brick at a time, about lifting up the values of our faith that Jesus came to give to all people.

It is the act of self-giving that will create a just community.

A millennial was once asked by a friend why he went to church.

- "I sponsor a refugee family.
- I provide meals and advocacy to stay for the homeless.
- I provide food for people around the world in times of crisis and seed to farmers in the developing world hit by natural disasters.
- I create a safe space for a nursery school and scouts, and community and cultural groups.
- I teach children good values, I combat loneliness and improve physical and mental health.

All this and more while I spend just an hour a week reflecting on how I can be a better person.

What do you do for an hour on Sunday morning?"

God cares; God invites us to care. God believes that we can make a difference, that our words and actions can help bring to fruition the kingdom Jesus proclaimed.

When we contribute to our church with our time, our gifts, our energy, our money, it goes into something so much bigger than we could do on our own. That widow had no idea she was going to live on for thousands of years, that her tiny gift would contribute to something much bigger than her own community's. She just did it because she was grateful.

God often uses unlikely people with small gifts gathered together to accomplish God's plan. God's mercy extends to all people, and God sees the widows at the end of their resources, and blesses them for their faith. Surely God blesses us too.