

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
November 10, 2024 – 25 Pentecost
Mark 12:38-44 – The Widow's Mite
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For some time, Jesus and his disciples have been on the way to Jerusalem, which we know means on the way to the cross. Now they are in Jerusalem. It won't be long before Jesus is arrested. We need to understand that for Jesus the end of his opportunity to teach and the end of his life are near. He looks at what is going on in the Temple, the holy place of sacrifice to God, with the clear, sharp vision of one who is about to complete his life of sacrificial, self-giving love on the cross. And he teaches his disciples important lessons about what he sees.

The first lesson is about a certain group of religious leaders, the men who make a show of prayer, who wear special clothing to announce their special status, who claim as their right respect in the world and the best seats in places of worship and at banquets. Jesus accuses these men of "devouring widows' houses." Though it is not certain exactly what this means, I think that the second part of today's lesson sheds light on the meaning of the phrase. The religious leaders are "funded" to some extent by the sacrificial giving of people who have little but give generously. In the Bible we read that God has a special concern for widows because they have lost the husbands who provided for their needs. God's people are meant to help provide what these women need, certainly not rob them of their resources. So, Jesus condemns the behavior of the religious leaders who should know God's law better than others and yet disobey that law.

Jesus "sat down opposite the treasury" in the Temple. In other words, he sat where he could see people put their offerings in the "plate." There were no discreet offering envelopes. There was no practice of the "church treasurer" being the only person who knew what people gave. Jesus watched as rich people put in large sums of money and a poor widow put in a very small amount of money. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For 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."

In practical terms, of course, the offerings of the rich people did much more than the widows' penny to keep the Temple running. If there were a Budget and Stewardship Committee for the Temple, its members would have been very happy to see all those large sums deposited in the treasury! But Jesus challenges his disciples – and us – to see things from the vantage point of God, not the world.

Perhaps the fundamental issue that Jesus is pointing to in his reflections about giving to the Temple is the issue of commitment. How do the gifts of religious leaders and of the widow reflect their commitment to God? How do their gifts – and ours – express or fail to express loyalty to God and God's way of self-giving love? How are their gifts – and ours – part of a plan of action to live day by day according to God's way of self-giving love?

Contemporary writers in the areas of psychology and spirituality point out that when we identify our core values and then construct our lives so that we live in accordance with our values, we are more likely to experience our lives as meaningful and to find happiness than if we don't live in accordance with our values. Here in church, we are reminded of Christian values. Loving God. Loving our neighbors as ourselves. Sharing the blessings God has given us with others in gratitude for God's blessings. Caring for the world God made. We are

challenged to examine our lives honestly and to bring our behavior in closer alignment with our Christian values.

You have received a stewardship letter from the vestry and a pledge card. This is the time of the year when we ask parishioners to make a financial commitment to the church for the coming year. A certain amount of money is needed to maintain the church and support the work of the church. This morning, I would ask you to make a commitment that reflects your Christian values. And as you think of the coming year and your commitment to the church, remember that we also need the work of many people to volunteer to do all kinds of tasks. How might you offer your time and talent to the church in 2025? Jesus praised the widow for giving all she had as part of her commitment to God.

On Wednesday morning I walked past one of my bookshelves and the cover of a book caught my eye – Desmond Tutu’s “God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time.” How did Archbishop Tutu articulate God’s dream in this book? He wrote, “God says to you, ‘I have a dream. Please help Me to realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will be more laughter, joy, and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and caring and sharing. I have a dream ... that My children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God’s family, My family.’”

I think it needs to be said that no matter how human beings act, in contrast to all human arrogance and prejudice and avarice, God’s dream stands fast. No matter how Christians have behaved since the time of Christ and are behaving now, in contrast to every perversion of the message of the Gospel, God’s dream stands fast.

We have been blessed to have the church in our lives. We have been blessed with the opportunity to come here each week to learn more about God’s dream, to share that dream with others, to worship and thank God for the blessing of our faith and every blessing of our lives. We have been blessed to be part of a church where we gather and affirm that, no matter what is happening in the world, God’s dream will not be changed or shaken or destroyed.

Our faith in God’s dream needs to be strong. We need to “hold fast to what is good.” That can be very challenging, so we need the support of the church, of God’s Word and sacraments, of others who are committed to making God’s dream a reality. If you value what this church is doing for us and will do for the people who may join us in the future, then I hope your commitment of time, talent, and treasure in the coming year will reflect the values you hold. Together, may we do all we can to make the dream of God a reality in this time and place.

In the name of Jesus, who taught and lived God’s dream. Amen.