

Mark 12:38-44

Who Do You See?

Do you see her? She is right there. You must have walked past her a dozen times. Well maybe you haven't seen her. She is disheveled, shuffling her feet in tiny bounce like steps as if trying to force momentum forward. It takes a lot to notice her. Even if you have to walk around her you don't really see her...for you don't look in her face...you just want to avoid any glance that might invite a request for help.

Then there is the man who hangs out on his old decrepit front step. Is he lonely or just a hermit? Who cares? Who really wants to know? Getting to know him might make one feel obligated to chat or to really pay attention to the brokenness, the hurt that made it so that family doesn't seem to be around or care.

Then there is the widow. In the hustle and bustle of a season that is already beginning its preparations. As store shelves quickly pivot from Halloween to Christmas barely noticing that there is a day of Remembrance of war after war and sacrifice that needs to be honoured...we miss seeing her...that woman. The crowds have our attention. The couple with the three kids all dressed in their brand-named clothing, the businessmen and women meeting up at the restaurant ready to order drinks and appetizers. You are a people watcher and so the crowds get your attention, the passers-by with their conversations, company, and ability to spend or have the credit card ready even if they don't have the cash in hand.

Then you spot her...over there...window shopping. Nobody notices her. No one is with her. There is nothing about her to draw attention. But you see her...and for some reason are drawn to watching her. Almost inconspicuously she enters a store and chooses a small item. It is under five bucks, but as she opens her wallet you notice that is all that is in there. There is no other money, no credit cards, you are not even sure if she has identification in there. She seems anonymous, but you are pretty sure she has just given her everything to buy a small token of a gift to be given to another as you listen to the brief exchange of conversation between the woman and the store clerk.

And then you connect this and the story of what has become know as the widow's mite. The woman at the temple, the story we just heard. The story of Jesus at the temple teaching.

What you may not remember is that the story begins with Jesus upending tables in the marketplace of the merchants, he has been harassed and challenged by temple authorities, but the crowds are taking it all in. Now Jesus is making an observation about those who walk around looking important, those who exploit the weak and the helpless while making it look like they give a dam.

They talk a big game, but the power, politics, and prestige, the wealth and income have made it so they don't even see what is going on around them, the suffering, the humiliations, the loneliness, the greed that takes from those who have little to nothing already and victimizes the vulnerable and the marginalized, over and over again.

If you have gone to church over the course of a lifetime you have heard this story preached pitting the small offering of the widow over the actions of the scribes. Her generosity when she has nothing to give lifted up as the example all of us should aspire to.

And maybe there is nothing wrong with that. However, there are few of us here who could relate to that kind of giving. It might even be hard to imagine it. Then again, I don't presume to know what your circumstances are or have been like at times as even I could tell stories about the financial challenges Ken and I have faced at different times in our forty-two years of marriage. I do know that when things were at their most difficult, making sure we enough for our family always went before making a donation to the church or anywhere else for that matter.

And that is another criticism of this story, one where people wonder what kind of influence the teaching of temple authorities had over the widow, or what blind trust in God this woman may have had that made her give until she might need to beg another for help so that she would be okay. I don't feel that I can critique any of these interpretations or the many more that have been supplied since time immemorial. Part of what makes scripture so interesting is that one can look at the stories and glean different aspects from it, different ways to interpret and find new understanding for living and faith.

What I struggle with in all of these interpretations is that the woman become an object lesson. But what if this is a story about God seeing who each of us is. A story that demonstrates that God sees us and the idea that you matter. Every individual matters.

If you go back to the story, you hear Jesus in the Temple teaching. He sees those who believe they should be noticed because of their stature in the community, their influence and power. He describes them, "They love to walk around in academic gowns, preening in the radiance of public flattery, basking in prominent positions, sitting at the head table at every church function."

The temple authorities were powerful amongst the Jewish people. The temple itself central to their society. The church is no longer a place of power and position in people's lives but we must be careful in our church structures that the same is not happening. Yet, I think we can extend this picture of people of power and influence, of money and wealth, to what does have influence over us from capitalism and politics to who gets to make decisions and who do we listen to because we think they may have the answers that satisfy our personal needs. Jesus warns, "all the time they are exploiting the weak and helpless. The longer their prayers, the worse they get. But they'll pay for it in the end."

All this was going on as Jesus was sitting across from the offering box at the temple observing how the crowd tossed money in for the collection. Many of the rich were making large contributions. And then she comes. We know nothing about her, but Jesus sees her. One poor widow who came up and put in two small coins – a measly two cents. Jesus who to this point has been addressing a crowd, calls his disciples over and says, “The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they’ll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn’t afford – she gave her all.”

Jesus saw her. He saw her trust, her heart, her need. He saw her. It takes time to stop and look to see those around us, especially those we tend to rush past. Those who don’t seem to have anything but a measly two cents to offer. But Jesus...Jesus...sees...her.

Where on the surface the text seems to talk about the value of money, maybe if we go a little deeper, we see that the text is talking about the value of a person. Not the value of what they have to offer. Their value as a human being.

This sermon comes on Remembrance Sunday and the Sunday before Remembrance Day. It comes at a time when we are thinking about the value of human life. The sacrifices made by so many who believed that the lives of those in concentration camps and civilian caught up in war on all kinds of borders and fronts was worth the cost to stand against power that thought it had the upper hand. It came as people rose up against power of those who believed that they could say that the Jews were less than human and those who aided them also had no value.

We are living in a time when now Israel is determining that other lives, those of Palestinians and Lebanese are not valuable as they take measures to hunt Hamas, without regard for the toll and tragedy of human life. And yes, I understand that Israel has felt attacked, but at what cost do countries decide the loss of life is worth it. The same can be said of Russia determining that Ukrainian lives can be sacrificed for the power of one man’s ego to be stroked. And though war is not raging in the U.S. at what cost will Trump’s agenda take root.

I could go on, because our world is broken. We do not as human beings see value in one another. We judge, we think we know better, we believe that people get what they deserve. They didn’t work hard enough, they shouldn’t have started on drugs, their parents didn’t raise them right. We find all sort of ways to belittle and devalue those who are different from us in all kinds of ways, including sexual orientation, social and economic status, race, religion, and culture. We judge those who don’t measure up to our standards and envy, go so far as to honour those who have more money, power, and prestige than we do.

Yet Jesus said, look at the widow. Look at the one who has no power, nothing visible to offer. Look there. I see her. God sees her. And because of that we can trust that God see each of us as well. God sees your efforts, your pain, your struggle. It is a powerful

thing to know that God loves you regardless of who one is. God loves but that does not leave us off the hook. Just last week we heard the command, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul mind, and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself. These words are all part of the same story. There is nothing separating them in the text. Only our time from one Sunday to the next separates these words.

God values us, love us, loves everyone, even those we think we dislike with every fiber of our body and then God says, love God, and love that person. In and of ourselves we cannot find the ability to love that way, but if we are to be image bearers of God in the world we have to find ways to see the humanity in everyone, from those who wield power to those who have none.

Take a look. With your body, mind, and spirit, look for those who you don't normally see, and love them not of yourself, but as one who bears the image of God in the world. Maybe then, just maybe the value of every human life will take root.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.