



MARK 12, 38-44

Today we hear the story of Jesus denouncing the scribes, and, the widow's offering in the temple. As Jesus was teaching, these two stories do have a link, they display two contrasting images of behaviour inspired by religion, both involving widows.

Firstly Jesus is furious with the Scribes as they flaunt their position not for the glory of God but to bring attention and glory to themselves. Jesus has often refuted the teaching of the scribes and now before a large crowd gathered in the temple area he criticises their behaviour. The scribes, along with the chief priests and the elders of the people, represent the centre of religious leadership that is now bent on Jesus' destruction. In a society in which the law of Moses regulated all aspects of life, their legal expertise gave them great power, prestige, and influence over others. It is as representative figures in this sense that they become targets of Jesus' criticism.

Jesus criticises the scribes for making their expertise, which should be primarily directed to the honour and glory of God, a means of drawing honour and glory to themselves. The scribes would wear long gowns when performing official duties in the temple, however they would continue to wear them in the market place and other public areas to attract respectful greetings in the marketplaces and other areas of public gathering. In synagogue assemblies and banquets they contrive to have special places set aside for them as a mark of their leadership role.

And much worse than this, they use their position to act as legal representatives for the poor and marginalised, especially widows, and they use their cloak of piety to win the trust of the most vulnerable in society, whose meager resources, once entrusted to them were given to the treasury in the temple and usually far more money was taken from these vulnerable people than they could afford.

In striking contrast to this scene of hypocrisy is the action of the widow in the following scene. Jesus is in a position in the synagogue to observe rich people making large contributions to the

treasury, while a poor widow throws in two pennies. Jesus points out to his disciples that this poor widow has given more than all the others that had contributed to the treasury, because the rich people gave out of their superfluous money, while the poor widow gave everything she possessed, all that she had to live on.

We have here two of Jesus' teachings that are connected by the story of widows, how they were badly treated by the pompous scribes and how faithful and committed the widow was who gave her two pennies to the treasury, all the money she had.

So what can we learn from these teachings? The scribes obviously were condemned by Jesus because of their pious attitudes and the way they used their position to gain favours, to be seen in the market place in their flowing robes drawing attention to themselves, and of course ripping off the widows and the vulnerable by taking more money for the treasury than they could afford. Jesus was not criticising the scribes for wearing robes so much, but for using them to show off.

I like to wear a plain alb and the stole in the colour of the season so that I am not drawing attention to myself as I blend in with the altar and surrounds. And I would never wear such things into the supermarket or out for dinner of course. Many groups of people such as nurses, soldiers and police wear uniforms so they can be identified.

I can remember a clergyman who would wear his collar to an outdoor cafe, buy a paper and a coffee and set himself up there for a few hours. Over time he found people would come and have a chat with him; what a fantastic ministry.

So here we have the action of the widow making Jesus' condemnation of the scribes even more serious. The scribes use their position to bring glory to themselves, while the widow's small contribution speaks volumes about her attitude of surrender to God in perfect trust and obedience.

And this is the message that Jesus was conveying to his disciples, a message of total commitment and trust, willing to give our all as we grow into discipleship with Jesus. This journey never ends, we are always learning about our awesome God, discovering new insights. We are given new challenges day by day and wonderful people to share our journey with, also we are to encourage and support one another on this amazing journey.

So let us go from this place as disciples of Christ willing to go forward in the name of Jesus, always trusting him and seeking his will as we go about our every day lives. There are so many distractions along the way in our modern lives, we tend to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of our busy lives, therefore it is so important to spend quiet time with Jesus in order to determine his will for us and be open to receiving his word.

Take time to be still in the Lord's presence; the beauty and awesomeness of his creation also has the power to relax and refresh our mind, body and soul. Jesus will always find new opportunities for us to spread his word of love, care and compassion in his troubled world, we just need to be aware of our surroundings, aware of a friend, neighbour or a stranger who needs some TLC.

Stay tuned into Jesus, always looking for the opportunities he provides and remember that he never forces his will upon us, he patiently waits for us to accept him into our hearts, to find quiet times to listen for his small still voice, with trust and obedience in our hearts.

Amen.