

Giving It Your All¹

Luke 21:1-6

First Presbyterian Church

November 7, 2021

Gospel Reading

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; ²he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³He said, “Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put in more than all of them; ⁴for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”

⁵When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ⁶“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

Sermon

When we visited Israel, we learned that there are two huge stumbling blocks to peace between Israelis and Palestinians. One is Israeli settlements in the West Bank... the other is the City of Jerusalem... and in Jerusalem, there is one small piece of real estate that is especially contentious – the Temple Mount.

Today the Temple Mount is mostly an empty plaza, except for two imposing Muslim buildings – the Al-Aqsa Mosque in one corner and the Dome of the Rock near the center. The Dome of the Rock stands almost exactly where the last Jewish temple stood two thousand years ago.

Built by the infamous King Herod the Great, this Temple was considered one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world... and when Jesus entered Jerusalem after his years of ministry in Galilee, he went directly there. But he didn't go for the architecture. He went because the Temple was the center of religious life in his world... it was the spiritual locus where God literally “came down to earth” - it was where heaven and earth intersected and God was intensely present.

As you know, the Temple facilitated an elaborate system of animal sacrifices... which, though offensive to us in our day, is no more cruel than a modern slaughterhouse. The Temple also housed vast warehouses of food that was stored to feed the hungry in case of famine or siege. But remember, this was the wicked King Herod's Temple... and though the architecture was awe-inspiring, the reality of the sacrificial system and food storehouses was hopelessly corrupt. The Temple leaders orchestrated the distribution according to their own interests and the “money-changing” operation in the courtyard was rife with profiteering. Those moneychangers whose tables Jesus would soon turn over were nothing but street-level dealers for the whole sorry system. And as you might guess, this whole sorry system was hardest on the poor.

¹ This sermon adapts and follows closely a sermon preached by Rev. Michael Lindvall to the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City, November 17, 2013.

Often forced to sell their land and possessions (and even their children into slavery) to pay the Temple tax, the system could be devastating for the poorest of the poor... and in this radically patriarchal world, NOBODY was poorer... nobody more vulnerable... than widows. Without a man to court for her, a widow was easy pickings for the greedy and corrupt. Well, one day Jesus and his disciples sat down in a part of the Temple called the "Court of the Women." Around that courtyard stood several trumpet-shaped receptacles to receive the offerings for the Temple treasury. As Jesus watched, several "prosperous-looking types" made big offerings. Then came a widow who gave the proverbial "widow's mite" – two coins that together were worth a penny. And in that act, right before everyone's eyes, a truth was enacted... a living parable unfolded. Recognizing the poignant irony of the scene, Jesus said to his followers: "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them... for all of them gave out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on."

May I cut to the chase... and remind you that this happened just a few days before Jesus' death... and that he knew what lay ahead. So, when he saw this desperately vulnerable human being giving freely "all she had to live on" he saw a foreshadowing... a living metaphor... he saw this widow doing in miniature the very thing he was about to do on a cosmic scale. He saw himself in HER.

Well, as Jesus said... and as you know/can see... the Temple of stone to which this widow gave her all is long gone. But Jesus came to teach us there is another "Temple" – there is another locus where God might dwell – another place where God "comes down." It is not in Jerusalem... it is not on any map... indeed, this other Temple where God might dwell is in you and me... it is the temple of our hearts.

Not the muscle that pumps blood throughout our bodies, but the "inward Temple" where he wants to reside. And though this Temple of the heart is prone to the same greed and vanity and corruption as old Herod's Temple of stone, there is also a Widow, Widow Jesus, who loves this inward Temple in spite of its less-than-ideal self. There is another widow, the Widow Jesus, who loves this inward Temple of the heart for what it might become. There is another widow who loves this Temple that it is in you and me so deeply that he gave "all that he had to live on."

In a moment – as we join in the meal that commemorates his sacrifice – we will be invited to come forward to give something. For some of us it will be a pledge to the work of our church next year... for others it will be an offering for today... for others it may be a personal commitment, maybe a prayer or a hope. The point is, we ALL have something to give. And when you come forward to give, don't do it only out of duty... and certainly, don't do it out of guilt. Come forward and give out of deep thankfulness – thankfulness for the blessings that fill your life... thankfulness for the great LOVE that has accepted you as you are... give out of thankfulness for the Widow Jesus who gave all that he had for you.