

Mark 12:38-44

Jesus warns against the legal experts who seek honour, and who cheat poor widows and show off with long prayers. Then he comments on a poor widow who places a small offering in the collection box, saying that she has put in more than anyone else, because she has given out of her poverty.

As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “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.”

I hope the woman died with dignity. Died? Yes. Probably mere days after she dropped those two coins into the Temple treasury. In case that's a surprise, consider what Jesus said about her: "She out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." She, an impoverished widow in first century Palestine, living on the margins of society. She had no safety net, no husband to advocate for her, no pension to draw from, no social status to hide behind. Two pennies short of the end. If I'm getting the timing right, Jesus died four days after the events in this story. I wonder if the widow did, too. What does it mean to applaud a destitute woman who gave her last two cents to the Temple, and then slipped away to starve? Why would Jesus praise a woman for endangering her already vulnerable life to support an institution he condemns? The simple answer is, he doesn't. Jesus never commends the widow, applauds her self-sacrifice, or invites us to follow in her footsteps. He simply notices her, and tells his disciples to notice her, too. He sees what everyone else is too busy, too grand, too spiritual, and too self-absorbed to see. Jesus's eyes are ever on the insignificant, the small, the hidden. The widow was prophetic in the Messianic sense, because her self-sacrifice prefigured Jesus's. Her story mirrored his. The widow gave everything she had to serve a world so broken, it killed her. Days later, Jesus gave everything he had to redeem, restore, and renew that world.

(Source: Debie Thomas, JourneywithJesus.net)

COCU65B Readings

The readings all examine the dynamics between those who are powerful from a human perspective and those who are poor and weak, but who trust in God. Ruth, who is poor and vulnerable finds protection and acceptance from the wealthy but good Boaz. The Psalm celebrate God's protection and provision. In Hebrews, Christ is shown as both priest and sacrifice, who offers himself in order to save his people, while, in Mark, the religious leaders, who should be sacrificing for the sake of others, are rather using their position for self-aggrandisement and corruption. The message is clear – human power is limited, often corrupt and ultimately fails those who trust in it. God's care, protection and justice is sure and eternal, and through the self-offering of Christ, all people can find security within the grace of God. The challenge is to ensure we place our trust in the right place, while also endeavouring to be faithful and righteous in whatever power or leadership we may exercise.

Security and provision for material needs are a constant human concern. From a purely human perspective, these needs are addressed by accumulation of wealth, and by aligning oneself with powerful people. In the global economy, the powerful and wealthy control the means of both security and provision, using their resources to favour themselves and their allies, and ignoring or neglecting the weak and poor. Ultimately this strategy undermines the very security and comfort that is hoped for. Only when God's priorities of faith, sacrificial giving and solidarity with the least are implemented can we find the peace we so long for. What this means is that, as Church, we need to be very careful of aligning ourselves with any political party, government structure or position of power and wealth. To do so is to betray our trust in God, and to fail in our mission to proclaim and embody God's Reign. Rather, as we work for justice, we are called to place our trust in God and God's ways, and remain independent of such authorities, in order to be able to work with them, while still speaking in challenge or confrontation of them when necessary. It also means that, whatever authority or wealth we may have must be used for the sake of bringing justice to the least, and not for any kind of self-aggrandisement.

There are two specific applications of today's readings on a local level. The first is the challenge to be engaged in the work of justice and compassion in our own communities and churches, where rich and poor often live and worship side by side. We must be careful how we measure the "success" of our churches – not by wealth and power, but by commitment to God's Reign – and we must ensure that we embody in our neigh-

bourhoods, the compassion and generosity of Christ. The second application has to do with where we place our faith, and how this impacts how we live. The Scriptures contrast our trust in human leadership and resources with trusting in God. Whatever we may do to ensure that we have life's necessities, we always need to remember that it is ultimately God in whom we must trust – as both Ruth and the poor widow did. However, as Ruth demonstrated, this trust does not mean that we do nothing, but we actively do what is necessary to provide and protect our lives, while trusting God's guidance and empowerment to sustain and enable us. In both cases, the trust that God seeks is very different from that of the religious leaders, who claim faith, but live by corruption and exploitation. (Source: John van de Laar, *Sacredise*)

Psalm 127: *celebrating God's protection and provision, and the gift of children.*

Unless the Lord the house shall build,

the weary builders toil in vain;

unless the Lord the city shield,

the guards a useless watch maintain.

In vain you rise at morning break,

and late your nightly vigils keep,

and weary days of toil partake;

for God's beloved there is sleep.

Like arrows in full quivers stored

are children given in days of youth;

for children are a great reward,

a gift from God in very truth.

(words taken from a hymn by Freeman Lewis, based on Psalm 127)

Reflection

Jesus as a boy trained to be a carpenter. Jesus as our risen Lord is the master builder. He builds us up, he builds his church, he builds our homes and families, he works beside us.

No need for us to get stressed, to work too hard or get too tired.

We build in God's power, we rest in God's peace.

Jesus as a boy loved his brothers and sisters.

Jesus as our risen Lord loves every child, everywhere.

Children are the most precious gift of all.

Children are our pride and joy. Young and old we build God's house.

We grow in God's power, we rest in God's peace. (Source: Silvia Purdie)

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

Naomi instructs Ruth to approach Boaz, which she does. Boaz takes Ruth to be his wife, and she bears a son called Obed – David's grandfather.

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do." She said to her, "All that you tell me I will do."

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Hebrews 9:24-28

Christ entered into heaven, offering himself once as the sacrifice for human sin. Then, he will appear a second time to save those who wait for him.

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.