

**Mark 12:38** 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, <sup>39</sup> and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! <sup>40</sup> They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

**Mark 12:41** He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup> A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> 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.”

This morning we have another challenging story from the Gospel of Mark, and it is doing exactly what it seems to have been designed to do. More than ever before in the last 5 years and 4 months that I have been with you, I feel the need to emphasize that. Last Sunday I mentioned that the Bible is not a list of rules or specific instructions on how we should live. It is full of stories and poems and other things. There are no easy answers, which is sadly what people often want. This story, which is a part of a bigger story, is doing exactly what it seems designed to do. And it is my job to make sure that I do not get in the way of it affecting you as it should.

I have to laugh, the guys at NAPA here in our village are my friends. I have long used their car parts. I enjoy visiting with them when I need parts or oil. And I actually have a knick-name, from the Gee-Ville NAPA guys. They call me PREACH. I had to order parts for our daughter’s car. They came. What does it say on the sheet of paper printed out? PREACH. So, I am known as PREACH. Now, I won’t tell them this, but I really don’t like that name. I think it is a negative word for many people. PREACH seems to imply that someone is telling you what to do, or that the

preacher is the authority who can tell you what everything means. There is special authority placed upon those who preach. It comes in our Ordination. But I would like to clarify here and now that preaching does not give anyone the power to say ***this is what the Bible means, and I have spoken!*** Let me say it once more: this story today is doing exactly what it is supposed to do. There is a process engaged, and it needs to run.

I don't normally give out quotes in sermons, but I need to offer some now, so that we can get back to these people at the Temple 2,000 years ago. These words are from a great holy man who has left teachings for the world that are still powerful today. This man was Martin Buber, a German who served in WW 1 as a chaplain in the German army. He survived, and was there when the modern state of Israel was reforming in 1948. In his many writings he speaks of "the Book," and "the Voice," and the power that he calls "Revelation." Regarding these words of God he wrote

"...the Spirit which made us, such as we are...this Spirit has not vanished. The way to it is still open; it is still possible for us to encounter it. The Book still lies before us, and the Voice speaks forth from it as on the first day. But we must not dictate what it should and what it should not tell us."

Buber tells us that the Voice in the Book is still real, and it is still waiting to confront us. He says that in the past, people were much more willing to confront the Word of God, even if they then chose to reject it. They would at least ***encounter*** the Book, and the Word in the Book. Buber wrote of our modern selves

"Man of today is not like the generations of old, who stood before the biblical Word in order to hearken to it or to take offense at it. He no longer confronts his life with the Word; he locks life away in one of many unholy compartments, and then he feels relieved. Thus he paralyzes the power that, of all powers, is best able to save him."

Is there a quick point to grasp here? Yes. There is a Voice in the Book, and it is the voice of God, trying to move us to understanding and truth. And one essential thing must happen if we are to benefit from the Voice of God: we must *hear the Voice*, and we must *encounter the Book*.

So here we are. We have a story, and we have a Voice to be heard, a Voice from the Book. The worst thing we can do is to lock it away. If nothing else, we at least need to Encounter the Book so that we might hear the Voice. We have a part of a story, and it has sufficient power to speak to us. Jesus has spent a day at the Temple, talking with groups of people, fielding questions and frankly entertaining the crowd. After he has taken questions from people, and he has won them over, he issues a warning about the Temple itself. It has become corrupt. Most Jewish people of Jesus' day felt bad about the Temple. They knew that it was not what it should be. And they knew that there were levels of corruption which even involved the Roman government.

So Jesus points out these Temple helpers known as the Scribes. He warns that they are living the good life, but he accuses them of devouring widow's houses. He is angry that they are benefitting from what is given to them by good-hearted widows. Just a quick side thought, my paternal grandmother lived as a widow in a house trailer far away from everyone. And my Dad would always be disappointed to find out that she had sent more money to a guy named REVEREND IKE. He was one of the first prosperity preachers on the radio. He would ask people to send him money, and he would send them blessings, so that they would have money up to their armpits! We still seem to have some of those TV and

media preachers today, still asking for money from widows, with the promise of blessings in return.

Back to our story, Jesus is not happy with these men. They live a fancy life, they are treated with honor, even though Jesus is accusing them of devouring the lives of widows. Jesus warns that they will face condemnation. But then he points out something that we must encounter: a poor widow walks up to the Temple offering zone, along with a lot of wealthy folks who publicly put in a lot of coins, for all to see. And what does she do? She puts in, according to Jesus, her last two little coins, equal to 1 cent. And this is all that she has. The story doesn't give more details. What does she do as she walks away from the Temple? Does she have a place to stay, a safe place to sleep? Will she have food? We do not know. All we know is that she now has nothing left.

What else do we know? We know that Jesus sees the wealthy, those who have much. He sees them put in their coins. Have they given it all away? No. They have tipped. They get to head home knowing that they have much left in the bank, their bank. Is there a contrast between this poor widow and the others? What should be done about this? Or is this just the way the world is? Are we to encounter this story and just go about our day? Or does the Gospel of Mark share it in order to shake us? Is this story an opportunity for the Voice to speak to us from the Book?

Even though the guys at NAPA call me **PREACH**, I am not going to tell you what you are supposed to think about this story. That is not my job. But it is my job to make sure that you see the story. We must Encounter the Book, and hear the Voice. This Voice

is the thing that can change us, and even the thing that can save us. But it must be heard.

Our Bible is not just a list of rule and teachings. It is filled with things that are supposed to unsettle us. They are supposed to shake us so that we are concerned about the world as it is, and the world as it should be! May that gap between the world as it is, and the world as it should be, may that gap grow smaller. Our holy words, the Voice within the Book, it must be heard, so that we have to try to answer the question and solve the problem for ourselves. I cannot tell you how to respond to the story today. But I can make sure that you hear the story, so that hopefully we can hear the Voice.

Can we imagine ourselves in the story? Can we imagine the Voice inviting us to give the story a much happier ending? How do we add a good ending to this story? Will someone take in the widow who has nothing? Will someone encourage those who have much to be generous, perhaps more generous than they usually are? None of this can happen unless we hear the Voice. I pray that we have heard it this morning. In the name of Jesus who tells us this story. AMEN.