

Christ Church, Ipswich
Sunday 7th November 2021
Sunday Worship with Holy Communion

Hello, I hope you are well. Today, in our service of worship there will be an opportunity for us all to share Holy Communion together. If you are worshipping at home and would like to participate, may I encourage you to prepare some bread and wine (or something similar) ready for this part of our worship. Our focus this morning will be on our Gospel Reading, Mark 12:38-44, where Jesus denounces the scribes and praises the poor widow's offering. Let us worship God together:

Call to worship

Let us open our hearts, our minds, and our eyes
 to see the generous gifts of God,
 and respond with praise and thanksgiving.

Opening prayers

Generous God,
 we come, individually and together,
 as your people to be resourced, inspired and blessed.
 We come, thankful for the self-giving love of Jesus.
 Inspired by his example, may we be generous and giving,
 with no reward other than knowing we are doing your will.
 We ask this in his name. **Amen.**

Eternal God, you call us to this time and place,
 to still our minds and gather our thoughts,
 to see the immensity of your giving to us.
 You are the giver of life in all its fullness;
 the giver of gifts beyond compare;
 the giver of more than we can imagine or comprehend.
 We come before you now. **Amen.**

R&S 187 Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
 bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
 gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
 bring and adore him; the Lord is his name.

Low at his feet lay thy burden of carefulness,
 high on his heart he will bear it for thee,
 comfort thy sorrows, and answer thy prayerfulness,
 guiding thy steps as may best for thee be.

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
 of the poor wealth thou would'st reckon as thine;
 truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness,
 these are the offerings to lay on his shrine.

These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
 he will accept for the name that is dear;
 mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
 trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
bring and adore him: the Lord is his name.

John S. B. Monsell. 1811-1875 altd.

A prayer of adoration

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
one in three and three in one, we adore you –
for you are light in our darkness;
you are the calm in our turmoil;
you are the wealth in our poverty;
the meaning in our pointlessness;
the hope in our despondency;
the meaning in our being.
For all of this and so much more,
we worship you. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession

Lord Jesus Christ,
we come to you in sorrow for our selfishness,
in regret for our greed,
in despair over our blindness and deafness
to the needs of those around us.
With penitent hearts we seek your forgiveness,
and your blessing to make us more generous,
more giving, more able to see, and more willing to listen. **Amen.**

Assurance of forgiveness

Our God of generosity forgives those who truly repent.
Our God lifts the burdens from our hearts
and the blindness from our eyes
and sets us free to be the people we are called to be. **Amen.**

A prayer of thanksgiving

Gracious God, for all you have poured out upon us:
we give you thanks.
For your Word that has inspired and fed your people; for those
who had vision to record it, skill to translate it and presence to share it:
we give you thanks.
For your love that has surrounded and enfolded us,
that has given us joy, confirmed our faith, nurtured our love
and given us enduring hope in the gift of the promise of abundant life:
we give you thanks.
To you be all praise and glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

R&S 492 Dear Lord and Father of mankind

1 Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word,
rise up and follow thee.

3 O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity
interpreted by love!

4 With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of thy call,
as noiseless let thy blessing fall
as fell thy manna down.

5 Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

6 Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm!

J.G. Whittier (1807-92)

Old Testament Reading 1 Kings 17:8-16*The Widow of Zarephath*

⁸Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ⁹'Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.' ¹⁰So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, 'Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.' ¹¹As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, 'Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' ¹²But she said, 'As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.' ¹³Elijah said to her, 'Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.' ¹⁵She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

Gospel Reading**Mark 12:38-44***Jesus Denounces the Scribes*

³⁸As he taught, he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, ³⁹and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! ⁴⁰They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

The Widow's Offering

⁴¹He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³Then 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. ⁴⁴For 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.'

Reflection

Today, we find Jesus continuing to teach in the temple precincts in Jerusalem, much to the delight of the crowds he attracts (Mark 12:37). He focuses on the scribes and now there is a striking contrast to the encouraging and sympathetic tone we read of in the preceding passage, where one of the scribes who had engaged with Jesus in a thoughtful, wise way had been described as not being far from the kingdom of God. (12:34). In today's lectionary reading, we hear Jesus launching a scathing attack on the hypocrisy of the scribes, who were religious professionals. Instead of teaching and living the way of selfless, sacrificial love for God and love for neighbour as had just been discussed by Jesus and the single scribe, these scribes are setting a terribly bad example of behaviour as they are far more interested in the honour that comes with visibility and status.

Now, I'm reasonably sure that most of us would admit that we appreciate being noticed, being recognised, and who among us does not value being respected by others? There is really something quite human, normal and morally right about this, isn't there(?), especially when we seek to share the very same respect with all those we encounter. We all like to be respected, but here we find that the scribes Jesus is now talking to have taken this to a whole new level! And really, their ostentatious desire for praise and respect reveals a rather ugly and false piety. Apparently, they were walking around in their long robes and saying excessively long prayers 'for the sake of appearance', with the aim of being noticed and as a way of concealing the underlying greed that drove them to consume the property of widows who had no one to inherit from them when they died. Yes, it is true that the religious leaders would help widows by managing their affairs when they were without male protection; they were economically threatened and often needed help. But it is also true that while they supposedly offered this help as an act of protection, the reality is, they often did it as a way of making themselves richer.

This kind of problem went beyond the conduct of the scribes. In reality, it was not just the greedy Scribes who were at fault; the Temple authorities were also driven by the same kind of greed! As we will be aware, the widow here is from the section of society that was regarded as being lower down the social order. She is often portrayed as a model of generosity, as a model of sacrificial giving, and with very good reason. She truly is this. This may well be why Jesus points out the generous widow, giving all that she had, because she was an amazing, exemplary giver! But the context suggests another possible emphasis, doesn't it? Jesus had already criticised the Temple's banking system for exploiting pilgrims (Mark 11:15-19). And then, if we think about the immediately preceding verse which speaks of the 'devouring of widows' houses', it seems quite possible that this is in fact another condemnation of how the temple works. The duty she performs to the Temple by contributing to its upkeep is at great personal cost. In terms of proportionality, she is giving much more than the bigger sums donated by the wealthy; she gives everything! And it is not reciprocated by the rich rulers. What is actually happening here? She is a victim of the same, self-centred greed that lies behind the scribes' extravagant displays that Jesus just highlighted. She is the victim of duty not performed. As the Torah made clear provision for the support of 'widows and orphans' which was in effect biblical shorthand for those in need. We could look at various texts in Deuteronomy to see how this was so (10:17-19; 14:28-29; 24:17-22). How well do we see these provisions being upheld by the Temple authorities in this week's story? Well, we don't see anything being done to help her, do we? It is heart breaking to see that the Temple authorities are happy to leave people such as her trapped in poverty, rather than using their resources to release them.

We noted a few minutes ago the contrast between the friendly scribe that Jesus spoke with in the preceding verses with the scribes who are in his sight this Sunday. But there is another remarkable contrast here between these Scribes and Temple authorities and the way of the self-giving servant in Mark 10:45 'who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'. Jesus has already said so much to his disciples about how they must be willing to sacrifice, to give up their own desires, to take up their crosses and become servants of all if they are to truly be his followers. Perhaps the sacrificial giving of the widow's story may be read as an anticipation of Jesus' own sacrifice of his life. What is clear in this contrast between the scribes and Temple authorities and Jesus, is Jesus' commitment to service and sacrifice for others. Throughout his life, he sought not to be empowered and elevated, but to invest his love, his power, time and again, into others. And we see how truly liberating this was for those in need in many of the Gospel stories.

So, as I draw to a close, what are we seeing in this Gospel story today? Well today's Gospel reading highlights the themes of costly discipleship and sacrificial giving. It is about everyday living in a world where there is so much need and injustice. We face up to challenging questions. How can we, as followers of Jesus, ensure that the most needy among us, around us, in our society, in our world, are cared for and supported? We ask these kinds of questions because this story impacts us, and because in this story we find Jesus commenting on something he sees happening right in front of him, because we are inspired by the example of the poor widow and saddened by the pompous and unjust behaviour of the scribes and Temple authorities. We consider how are we doing in our own commitment to generosity towards others in every way. But we also think carefully about how we might deepen our commitment to pray and to work for economic and social justice today. And as we have been reminded throughout this last week at COP 26, through stories and desperate pleas from those suffering around the world, any work against the injustices we see happening right in front of us will involve a new level of commitment to protect our climate and care for creation. May we know God's leading and guiding and be strengthened in our resolve to be a generous and just people who follow in the sacrificial and self-giving way of Jesus. Amen.

A moment for reflection

Our prayers of intercession

God of all creation,
 you ask us to care and not to destroy;
 to share and not to abuse what you have given to us.
 You ask us to cherish the earth not to abuse it
 and to use earth's resources fairly and not to waste them.
 Forgive our failures and renew our commitment.
 God of all creation,

May we use your gifts wisely and care for the earth.

Generous God,
 you have placed us in community
 in our churches, families, schools and neighbourhoods
 where we learn that we are stronger together.
 You created people in your image,
 so amazing and capable of so much that is good,
 yet also capable of choosing the wrong thing.
 Give us ears to listen to one another,
 hearts to care for each other's pain,
 and hands ready to heal the hurts of our world.
 As world leaders meet to discuss climate change,
 may your Spirit of truth and justice lead the way
 to a more compassionate, a more equal and a simpler way of life.
 God of all creation,

May we use your gifts wisely and care for the earth.

Generous God,
 you give us all that we need for life.
 May we learn to live with the same generosity that you show to us,
 using resources for our need and not our greed,
 and offering what we can to improve the lives of people who struggle.
 May we never be closed to the parts of the world that are troubled,
 or closed to the sufferings caused by our greed in the developed world.
 Give us and our world leaders generosity of spirit,
 so that we can walk in another person's shoes.
 May we begin to see that we share one home,
 and that our actions can improve or damage life chances for others.
 God of all creation,

May we use your gifts wisely and care for the earth

Generous God,
 you count the hairs on our head
 and care for the smallest of the creatures on earth.
 May we live as though our days belong to you,
 using the gifts of our time and our talents to serve our neighbour,
 and make a difference in the world.
 May we hear the cry of those in pain.
 May we also pay attention to the cry of our earth for healing,
 and the fears of the peoples in areas most at risk including:
 Lagos in Nigeria; Yemen; Haiti; United Arab Emirates; Manila in the Philippines; Kiribati; Japan;
 the Netherlands; India and Sri Lanka and so many more...
 We hold the peoples of these areas in our hearts
 together with the hopes and dreams of children and young people.
 God of all creation,
may we use your gifts wisely and care for the earth. Amen.

R&S 371 Take my life, and let it be

Take my life, and let it be
 consecrated, Lord, to thee;
 take my moments and my days,
 let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my silver and my gold,
 not a mite would I withhold;
 take my intellect, and use
 every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my hands, and let them move
 at the impulse of thy love;
 take my feet, and let them be
 swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my will, and make it thine;
 it shall be no longer mine;
 take my heart, it is thine own;
 it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my voice, and let me sing
 always, only, for my King;
 take my lips, and let them be
 filled with messages from thee.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
 at thy feet its treasure-store;
 take myself, and I will be
 ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-79)

Our children and young people will be joining us ready for communion

Holy Communion

Words of Invitation

Look, here is the Lord's Table spread as for a feast.
 Bread for breaking, wine poured for drinking:
 signs of his love and hospitality,
 symbols of his life broken, his blood poured out.

He is not dead!
 He is risen and present among us,
 evidence of God's covenant grace and promise.

So we come in faith to the table, you and I,
 companions on the journey.
 Some of us fresh and eager,
 others weary, in need of nourishment.
 All of us conscious of our failings.

***Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.***

Come now, don't hesitate,
the feast is ready
and the Lord himself invites you.

We Remember

It was the night of the Passover, and Jesus and his friends were sharing supper together. While they were eating, he told them that one of them would betray him. They were appalled and protested saying 'Not I Lord, I would never betray you.' Jesus took some bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them saying 'Take this and eat. This is my body.' He took the cup of wine and after giving thanks passed it among them saying as they drank 'this is my blood of the covenant. It is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. I will not drink again until the day comes when I drink with you in my father's Kingdom.'

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Creating and redeeming God,
we give you thanks and praise
for your covenant of grace:
a covenant expressed in sinful people
who know forgiveness,
the weary who are refreshed,
the hungry who are nourished,
the captives who are set free
and the oppressed who experience liberation.
Thank you that you chose to make us a part of your story.

Thank you for Jesus Christ who revealed your love in his death and resurrection
and who continues to share his life with us through bread and wine.
Thank you for sending the Holy Spirit
who sustains us in our walk together,
helping us to watch over each other,
to pray for one another,
and to work together for justice and truth.

As we eat this bread
and drink from the cup,
(signs of hospitality and grace),
may we be empowered to serve boldly
wherever you may call.

Accept these prayers and our heartfelt thanksgiving
in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

We Share***The bread***

One people, one loaf, a sign of our common faith
and testimony to the generosity of our lord Jesus Christ.

Take this bread, food for faith,
and feed on it with thanksgiving.

The wine

One people, one cup, a sign of the new covenant
poured out for you and for many.

It is a covenant sealed by his blood.
When we drink we must be thankful
and agree together never to forget.

We Journey

**Holy God,
we have been nourished and had our thirst quenched,
through bread broken and wine poured
in thanksgiving for your son Jesus Christ.
Send us out to be as generous to those we meet this week,
that we might show through word and deed
that he is not dead, but risen and present among us.
Hallelujah! Amen.**

Gathered around this table as God's people sat in the presence of our loving God, we remember before God all those within our church family, and those close to us, who are in need. We keep those who have lost loved ones recently in our prayers. God of comfort, draw close to them with your loving presence. We pray for those who are facing difficulties with their health at the moment. We think especially of Stephen Hogger, Ellen Naunton, Margaret Widdowson, Janet Wilson, Bill and Irene Gale, Betty and Brian Clarke and their family. We pray also for your rich blessing upon all our dear church friends in residential care and all those unable to join us here at the moment.

We bring other friends and loved ones before God in a moment of quiet.

God of love, hear all these our prayers, in the name of Jesus, amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

R&S 280 Join all the glorious names

1 Join all the glorious names
of wisdom, love and power,
that ever mortals knew,
that angels ever bore.
All are too mean to speak his worth,
too mean to set my *Saviour* forth.

2 Great *Prophet* of my God,
my tongue would bless thy name;
by thee the joyful news
of our salvation came:
the joyful news of sins forgiven,
of hell subdued and peace with heaven.

3 Jesus, my great *High-Priest*,
offered his blood and died:
my guilty conscience seeks
no sacrifice beside;
his powerful blood did once atone,
and now it pleads before the throne.

4 My dear almighty *Lord*,
my *Conqueror* and my *King*,
thy sceptre and thy sword,
thy reigning grace I sing.
Thine is the power: behold I sit
in willing bonds before thy feet.

5 Now let my soul arise
and tread the tempter down;
my *Captain* leads me forth
to conquest and a crown.
A feeble saint shall win the day,
though death and hell obstruct the way.

6 Should all the hosts of death
and powers of hell unknown
put their most dreadful forms
of rage and mischief on,
I shall be safe, for *Christ* displays
superior power, and guardian-grace.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

A sending out prayer

Generous God, make us generous.
Make us generous in joy,
and generous in love.
Help us to remember what we have done today.
Remind us, every day,
that we need to share our love for you with others,
that we need to give and live generously –
for you are a generous God, our God.
Be with each one of us and all whom we love,
this week and always. **Amen.**

The Blessing

And may the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

The Grace

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, for evermore. Amen.**