

Rev. Terry Ward-Hall, 21 March 2021

There are two very similar passages known as The Widow's Offering or The Widows Mite; a slightly longer version in Mark 12 and today's one from Luke. The traditional interpretation of this story tends to focus on generous or sacrificial giving by contrasting the conduct of the rich with that of the poor widow, encouraging generous or even sacrificial giving. I've heard the story preached on a number of occasions; sometimes to encourage giving towards a church building project; or a ministry initiative and once in support of a struggling charity.

The teaching invariably focused not on the generosity of the amount given but on the generosity of the giver's heart. And I think there is a good deal of merit in taking that line. But I think the story dovetails very neatly with the sacrificial cost of following Jesus which I spoke about three weeks ago.

But before saying more, let me tell you a little story I once heard. It starts as most good stories do with the words once upon a time.....Once upon a time, a pig and a chicken were walking past a village church which was struggling financially. They so wanted to help, but didn't know how.

They stopped to read a notice advertising a prayer breakfast due to be held on the following Saturday. On the bottom of the notice was the menu. It read "Bacon and eggs will be served 6.30-8.30". The chicken turned to the pig and said, "*See. We can help the work of the church!!!*"

"Yes" replied the pig, "*but yours will be only a contribution, mine will be a sacrifice*".

That difference between *contribution and sacrifice* is, I think, at the heart of today's story of the poor widow.

We are told that Jesus sees the rich people giving big donations to the temple, no doubt in much the same way as Rev Jon described in his Ash Wednesday sermon – by waving large wads of cash in the air before doing so. But, the point is that no matter how large the wad might have been.....they still retained their fortunes.

The money represented a small proportion of their accumulated wealth. It was in effect, chicken feed... nothing more and nothing less than a contribution to the temple treasury. Their financial security would not be affected; they knew they could afford to eat drink and make merry well into the future.

By contrast, the poor widow comes along and puts in a humble gift of two small copper coins. There are many different calculations as to exactly how much that would be in today's currency, but certainly less than the government's daily £3 allowance for providing free school meals.

But more important than the monetary value is the fact that Jesus tells us that those two copper coins was *all* she had to live on. She literally had no means of buying her next meal. She was destitute.

There's no dialogue in the story and we are not told why the woman did as she did.... but Jesus commends her sacrifice to his disciples.... saying that her offering was more pleasing to God than all the rest... because she gave all she had to live on.

It was not the generosity of the amount that Jesus saw as important but the generosity of the widow's heart. She was prepared to make a sacrifice of herself, placing her trust entirely in God's hands.

And I think this is a timely reminder that faith and trust are not the same thing.

Put simply, trust is faith in action and today's story illustrates that well. Trust is a verb.... Trust is a choice....Trust is something we do.... Trust is the manifestation of our faith in our thoughts and actions.

The widow's faith said God can act to save her.... her trust said God will act to save her. And there's the rub; it's a lot harder to exercise trust in God than simply having faith in God.

So what might we take home from today's story? Well, firstly, maybe we ought to spend a little more of our time people-watching like Jesus did.... learning to be observant. We notice the rich; they are easy to see.

But how often does the equivalent of the widow pass us by unnoticed?

Maybe we should ask God to help us observe more of what is going on around us, to recognize and to appreciate even small acts of love and care.

Secondly, maybe we should stop comparing ourselves to others. The amount of what we do is not that important to God.... it is why we are doing what we do that is important.

Helping, supporting and putting the needs of others before our own needs is what is important.

Thirdly, to notice in particular during this pandemic, the generosity of ordinary people in their community.

Those who have given away home grown produce; those who have shopped for others but refused payment; those who have volunteered to help the NHS; those who have simply given time to another while out on a daily walk or by telephoning to extend the hand of friendship to those sheltering.

And maybe we should become an increasingly loud voice saying that we want to continue caring like this afterwards.

To misquote the TV add about puppies and Christmas.....generosity is for life, not just for the pandemic.

Let us pray.

Father, help me to live the days ahead in a generous and gracious way, trusting in you, in every way.
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind and caring to everyone I meet.
Spirit, help me to love the lost, the needy and the disadvantaged, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen