

The Poor Widow: Luke 21:1-4

A 'still' in the hullabaloo of Jesus' last week. Over the last seven days, he has arrived in Jerusalem on a donkey, turned over the tables in the temple, cursed a fig tree (and explained what he meant by it), challenged the chief priests, told the parable of the wicked tenants, discussed tax, resurrection and the first commandment, pointed out the swaggering rich scribes, and then ... spotted a widow about to give away her last two coins.

Do you ever find yourself people watching? It was something I missed during lockdown, when all we could do was stay at home or go out for a walk. Now I'm back to it in a big way. Not to criticise how people look, but wondering what their story is. Where they come from, what their relationship is with the people they're with, what might happen next in their lives. I hope that's not a bad thing to do. And I do wonder if Paula Goodber, who wrote the stories we're basing our talks on during Lent, likes people watching too.

Paula Gooder's story about the poor widow imagines that she is the great niece of Anna, an elderly widow who was living in the temple when Jesus was taken there as a baby. Simeon is holding baby Jesus and Anna comes to see the baby Jesus and then rushes off to tell everyone that she has seen the Messiah. I think that makes our widow a bit younger than the one in my first picture. Try this one.

I love the way the scribes are depicted here.

Paula calls her widow Anna as well and creates a connection with her previous story, about a woman called Sarah. That's how a lot of the book works, each character linked to the next.

Like me, she enjoys a story with a happy ending.

On Mothering Sunday, we deserve a happy ending. a let up from the 'giving up', the worries and sadness, the fears and anxiety which can fill our lives. We can remember all mothers, and the joyful moments, unexpected rewards and delightful opportunities of motherhood. Those of us who are mothers can feel loved and cherished. We can treasure happy memories of our own mothers. And we can share God's gentle love with anyone whose experiences are not so good.

So here's the story: Paula's Anna spent time with her Great Aunt Anna, and was amazed when people said she'd finally lost it: she was saying she'd seen the Messiah and he was a baby. She'd even given him a cuddle and sung him a lullaby.

Shortly afterwards she died, with the words, 'the steadfast love of the lord endures for ever' on her lips. Paula's young Anna reflects that when she was young, everything had seemed rosy. She had married and had children, but there had been an epidemic. Her parents had died, and then her boys and finally her husband. Her profound faith had been terribly shaken. She doubted that God even noticed her. Life has been so hard for her and now she has nothing. Nothing but two coins. She stands behind a boastful rich man as he pays his temple tax, and brags about his seven sons. And his own generosity. He looks at her with disdain. Anna remembers her Great Aunt's words, 'his steadfast love endures for ever' and drops both coins into the funnel.

Then she sees someone looking intently at her. Looking, it seems, right into her heart. And he turns to the people he's with, and seems to talk about her. Admiringly!

She leaves the temple and meets up with Sarah, (from the previous story) who invites her in for dinner. From what Sarah says, it seems as though she's heard about Jesus too. So the story ends happily.

Anna's extreme generosity is recognised and rewarded; Jesus clearly tells us that the rich show-offs are going to come to a sticky end. Great.

Does this mean that we have to give everything away?

Yes.

And no.

However, we definitely have to stop showing off!

Jesus is watching real people leading real lives and behaving as real people do. Good and bad. Rich and poor. Generous and mean. And he does expect us to be generous with what we have. Look at

Matthew 25:35-40 New Revised Standard Version

³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,^[a] you did it to me.'

AND he wants us to devote our entire selves to him.

Matthew 16:24 Contemporary English Version ²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples: If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross and follow me.

Both coins. Our whole life, not just Sunday morning or when there's a disaster in the world. Our whole selves. All the time. Not easy. But worthwhile!

Now a question. Has Jesus ever looked over and pierced your heart with his intense, loving gaze? I hope you won't mind me sharing. (and please don't imagine that I rank myself with the woman in the Bible. I've just had a glimpse.)

Here's another question. Do you know Silwood Road? (A terrible place for traffic jams.) The shop there which is also a post office? Well, that's my place. I was driving past one day, with a carful of children, our youngest was a baby. And suddenly I was filled with enormous joy. What have I done to deserve this? I thought. And I realised. Nothing.

I pray that, today and every day, all mothers may be filled with the same knowledge of God's grace. Amen.

Fleur Pelly, 27/3/22