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Pentecost 25

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“A Poor Widow, A Rich Bride”  
Text: Mark 12:38-44 (1 Kings 17:8-16)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There were a lot of people in Jerusalem. It was almost the Passover. So people were coming from all over, coming to Jerusalem for the Feast.

And coming to Jerusalem, they went to the Temple. It never failed to impress. Like tourists who go to New York City and walk around with the faces to the sky, impressed by all the skyscrapers and amazed at their dizzying heights. So it was at the Temple, as they went and got in line to give their offerings.

There were thirteen “trumpets.” That’s what they called them. Metal tubes that flaired out at the end, like trumpets; or like hands begging crying for a handout. And when one put money into them, they made a clanging sound as the coins made their way down the tubes and into the boxes at the end. And it was a noisy day. Lots of people. Lots of offerings.

And Jesus watched. All kinds of people and all kinds of offerings. Many rich folks came. Their large deposits made lots of noise. And they seemed pleased at that. They must be good. They must be doing something right for God to have blessed them so. And lots of noise would mean others would know it, too.

Mark doesn’t tell us how long Jesus stayed, though it must have been for some time if He saw *many* put in large sums. Surely, not everyone did. But many did. Many among all who came to the Temple that day. So why did Jesus stay? What was He waiting for? What was He watching for?

At last, she came in. After the many. At the end. Like she didn’t want to be seen or noticed. Her offering made hardly a sound. None at all, in fact, if you weren’t paying attention. And it didn’t take her long. The offerings of the rich took a while, to dump all those coins in. She was in and out quickly. Her two small copper coins disappearing down the chute and lost in the large pile of coins at the bottom, just as she was surely lost in the great crowd of pilgrims.

Except Jesus noticed her. Had He been waiting for her? He didn’t speak to her. He didn’t

give her anything. But He speaks to His disciples. He wanted them to notice her, too. Not just to notice the rich and strong and able; but the poor and weak and small. For with Jesus, compassion, not admiration, is what it's all about.

Maybe He wanted them to help her. He had done this kind of thing before. When there were 5,000 families who had come to hear Him teach, He had told His disciples to give them something to eat. They said they couldn't. Alright, then. Here is a single poor widow, who just *put in everything she had, all she had to live on*. . . . So . . . [wait . . . pause . . .]

The scribes noticed widows like this. To *devour* them and their houses. Not openly and obviously, of course. For then they would have been criticized and would have had to give up their best seats in the synagogues, the places of honor at feasts, and the greetings and admiration they got in the marketplaces. But when the opportunity presented itself . . . *God helps those who help themselves*, right? They were good at looking religious and praying, even while they were preying upon widows. Maybe *this* widow. Maybe that's why two small copper coins is all she had.

So Jesus points her out to the disciples. Was it a test? Here is someone who needs mercy. So . . . *do you get it yet?*

Well, we're not told what happened. But given the disciples' track record, we can probably safely assume they didn't. Do we? Maybe this story isn't so much about giving as it is about mercy. Or maybe the two go together . . .

These last few weeks at the end of the Church Year - which are now in - turn our attention to the last days of the world. To consider that we may be in them. No one knows. Many people through the centuries thought they were in them. Luther did. And one of these days, we'll be right. But maybe that's the thing. Maybe God always wants us to think we're in the last days. Maybe that's why Jesus doesn't tell us when it will come and says that we *can't* know when. So that we'll remember that this - this world and life - is not all there is. So that we'll look for Him. So that our attention will be in the right place. That we'll notice what we ordinarily wouldn't otherwise notice. And who.

I said at the start of this sermon that it was almost Passover, but what I didn't say is that it was almost time for *Jesus'* Passover - the time for His passing over from death to life. You see, these were His last days. This story takes place during His last week. The clock was ticking. He would soon - in just a day or so - be on the cross. And He knew it.

So why take the time for this? To sit in the Temple. To notice poor widows? For surely there were lots of other important things He could or should be doing, right? That's how we think.

But Jesus is always noticing those the world takes little notice of, or thinks little of. Children, widows, lepers, the poor. And He doesn't just notice them, He spends time with them, eats with them, speaks with them, forgives them. Good news for us. Even if you are somebody the world notices now. For how long will it last? Until you're forgotten, too? No longer useful, living in a Nursing Home, pushed aside by the go getters. Like a widow with only two small copper coins . . .

But Jesus notices. Her. And you. Even when He is about to die. For He is going to the cross for her. And you. And even on the cross, who does Jesus notice? The thief hanging next to Him, His mother beneath Him. And He takes care of them. And you. He is never too busy, He never has more important things to do than mercy. For He is about to give all He has, His very life, for her. And you.

So another lesson for His disciples. And you. ***Beware of the scribes***, Jesus tells them. Not just because of what they were doing, but because of what they had become. For they had become quite worldly. Concerned with themselves, concerned with their appearance, concerned with their honor, concerned with their wealth. And so little room for mercy. It is easy to criticize them. How easy it is also to become like them.

But *the bridegroom soon will call us, come to the wedding feast* (LSB #514). And the trumpets on that day will not be ones for receiving offerings, but announcing our Saviour's return. And on that day those wedded to the world will become widows when this world passes away. But those now widowed by the world and waiting for the bridegroom - for them, the feast that will have no end.

So that day in the Temple, you tell me: who were the poor ones, and who really was the rich one?

The end of the church year gives us that chance each year to remember that we may be living in the last days, and that one of these days, we'll be right. And so to hang onto the things of this world a little less, and hang onto our bridegroom a little more. To notice ourselves a little less, and notice those in need of mercy a little more. And not to worry so much about the approval of the world, that they notice us - and focus a little more on the good news that Jesus notices you. That He is not too busy and you are not too small for Him. Even if all you have are two small copper coins.

But you have much more than that! For you have been baptized and redeemed not with gold or silver, but with the blood of the Son of God - a payment worth much more than all the gold and silver in the world. And you are forgiven all your sins - all of them, not just some of them. That there be nothing between you and your bridegroom; that not even death be able to part you. And you are fed not with the oil and flour that never run out, as Elijah's widow was, but with the Body and Blood of Jesus which will never run out. That you eat not just for many days, or even as many days as you live on this earth, but

forever. For while the widow put her two small copper coins, all she had, into the Temple's offering trumpet, Jesus puts His two things, His Body and Blood, all He has, into you. The pledge, the promise of His forgiveness, and that He is coming back for you.

So that day in the Temple, the rich put in all she had. The poor gave only a tenth. And the King, He saw His bride. And knew that she would be a widow not much longer . . .

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.