Luke 19:45 to 21-6

45In the hearing of all the people he said to the disciples, 46“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets. 47They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

*The Widow’s Offering (Mk 12:41–44)*

**21** He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; 2he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. 3He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; 4for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”

*The Destruction of the Temple Foretold (Mt 24:1–2; Mk 13:1–2)*

5When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, 6“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” [[1]](#footnote-2)

 Often I’ve heard the story of the widows mite, or the widows offering, preached focused on just the verses of Luke 21 1-4 or Mark 12:41-44. In those sermons the Preacher would lift up giving and how the rich people gave out of their abundance. It is much easier to give when it is out of our abundance. We don’t have to worry about pinching pennies, budgeting, nor will we miss that money for we have more than enough. At the same time as the rich people are putting in their gifts a widow approaches and puts in the smallest currency. Jesus lifts up her gift as more than all the money the rich people put in, because she gave out of her poverty. She understood giving to God til it hurt and did so knowing that was money that would be missed. Normally the Pastor would finish this sermon asking the congregation to give to God just like this widow. Give to God everything even if its going to hurt for your reward is in heaven. But…

 But I feel that the Pastor is missing that this story has context and is sandwiched between two other short stories. Before the widow’s offering, Jesus said to those around, Beware of those with long robes (wealthy clothes) who love to be greeted with respect (prideful), have the best seats in the synagogues (more pride), and for the sake of appearance say long prayers (pride again). These people Jesus says to beware of are operating in the religious places (synagogues) and they are the ones devouring the widow’s house. Jesus warns against these ‘important’ religious people for they were taking advantage of the widow.

 From this story we then read about the widow’s offering. They are in the temple watching people place gifts into the treasury. From the crowd of people who look like they can afford to give comes a woman whom Jesus calls widow. Being a widow in the time of Jesus meant not only had her husband died, but because of his death her household lost their largest income provider. Being a widow meant a hard life because you are living in a society designed for men to work and for you to stay home with the children. A widow was dependent on others for her and her households survival. If she had a house because as the previous verses mentioned, the widow’s household could be devoured as they try to pay off debts, afford bread, or give to the temple even though they have nothing to give. Widows were the most vulnerable members of Jesus’ society.

 Why does the widow give? Is it because it is expected you give to the temple? Maybe. Is it because of her faith? Could be but what does that say about the faith if it asks the widow to give everything she has and leaves nothing for her to buy food with? We must be careful when we mix our expectations with what God is asking.

 It is a trying time for churches who are not able to gather together. Anxieties have increased across the Kentucky Conference about the finances of the Church so much so that District Superintendents are providing guidance on how to do online giving. Cooper has a recent history of being in financial need and we too could be anxious about how we are going to pay the church bills while the social distancing lasts. But we are not as a church going to ask everyone to give everything they have, as the widow did at the temple.

 We are going to ask that everyone be good stewards of the resources God has provided. These are trying times. People are losing jobs, getting laid off, and are unsure of how they will pay their bills. Others are fortunate enough to keep their incomes during this time but are in need of resources that are sold out in the supermarkets. Still others may not have money or goods but they have the resource of time. None of us have everything but one of the great strengths of coming together is that as a community we can pull together enough. Enough looks differently at different times. Having enough food when the kids are in school looks very different then having enough food when they are out. (I am still unsure of those who though ‘enough’ toilet paper meant 5 or more packages from Costco. There’s probably some kind of condition we need to be in prayer about lol).

 Membership vows for the church include: to faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness. Even with Covid-19, that has not changed. There are so many ways in which we can pray and so many prayer requests we can pray for. For sickness and recovery, for health and good relationships, for strength and perseverance. For opportunities to be a better Christian witness. We all have our own prayer requests as well as prayer requests for our church congregation, community, and the world.

 The church community is still in need of people to give their time in service and presence to help one another, to make phone calls to check in and let someone know they are being thought of and that they are love. The church still needs people to give their time to write cards, go shopping for someone, or to give some items of food or rolls of toilet paper.

 The church is in still in need of your gifts, both monetary and of service. The gifts of service and needed and necessary for us to stay connected during this time. We cannot overvalue enough the gift of phone calls, cards, and loving support. These gifts provide both a service on behalf of the church as well as the witness of Christ’s love and light in the world. This witness is needed both online and offline, in person and in messages. The witness of Christ is needed when we are at the grocery store (more now than ever maybe) and when we are just with loved ones. In all that we do may we do so as a witness of Christ.

 As a Church let us be that witness of God’s love and light in the world. Let us serve others and not be unjust in our asking from others and ourselves. Some members of our community may not be able to give financially right now, some members are having to deal with a loss of income or health circumstance. Knowing that these members (and all of us as well) are children of God and persons of worth let us not ask them to give til it hurts. Instead let us ask how we can help? Let us ensure that they have enough food and support during this time. For those of us who have not suffered financial loss, let us continue to give what we can to support the church as well as the community in what ways we can. The church still has bills to pay and a food ministry that is about to be needed by many.

 But as the church let us not do the injustice done to the widow. For after that Jesus and those following went outside of the temple. As they looked at how beautiful it was Jesus said, “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” As a church let us invest in those things that matter, one another. We do so knowing that there are bills to pay, but lets not pay them at the expense of one another. For the widow needs food as well.

Let us pray.

 Gracious God, who have blessed us in so many ways that are seen and unseen. During this time of anxiety, fear, and stress please be with us and guide us in the decisions that we make. We pray for good health among all our congregation and that if any are in need that they ask so that we can be a witness of your love by showing love to one another. During this Lenten season that leads to the cross, with the extra time we might find ourselves with, let us use it to honor you. In your name we pray. Amen.

 I am grateful for the many ways in which the Cooper Congregation is the church with or without the building. The way you all continue to show love and support for each other. The way you’re willing to help with whatever gifts, talents, and resources you have is inspiring. Let us continue to be the church and support the church as the body of Christ and the church as our worship space. If you have any questions about giving to Cooper or are current needs, please feel free to contact myself or Glinnie.

Questions for today:

How can I continue to act on my membership vows to the church?

In what ways can I be a better witness of the love of Christ to those around me?

How may I better use my time in service to God and to others?

Who haven’t I heard from that I could call?

Challenge:

Purposefully plan time to use in a way in which you can let someone know they are loved. Cards and phone calls can go a long way but so do other acts of love. If you need addresses just let me know.

-Pastor Anthony

1. [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nrsv?ref=BibleNRSV.Lk20.45&off=53&ctx=3%3A1–7%3B+Mk+12%3A38–40)%0A~45 •In+the+hearing+o). (1989). (Lk 20:45–21:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)