

Sometimes the scripture that we read this morning is broken into two pieces - the first with Jesus condemning the scribes and the second with Jesus praising the widow. But there is something telling that emerges when we read them together, as we will this morning, with care and compassion.

But before we jump into the actual text, let's take a moment to set the scene. One of the Bible Studies that I participate in always begins with the questions "where are we in space and time?" In space, we are in Jerusalem. In time, this passage takes place in the Gospel of Mark after the Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem and we are quickly moving towards Good Friday. Why is that important? Because Jesus knows that this is one of his last opportunities to teach his disciples before he gives his life on the cross.

Jesus begins this particular teaching in condemning the scribes - but I want us to be really careful here. Jesus isn't condemning them because they are scribes. He is condemning those scribes who behave in a certain way - taking everything from the widows. Jesus is condemning the action that isn't a reflection upon the who the scribes were to be.

This is so important, because in the Gospel of Mark, there are a lot of questions being raised about how the Messiah behaves and as a result, how the Messiah's followers behave. Remember, people aren't expecting the Messiah to show up and act like Jesus - they want a warrior. They want someone who is going to make the Roman occupation go away. They want what they have imagined the Messiah to be like in their minds. So now they are seeing Jesus show up with followers who aren't swinging swords or speaking of war against Rome, but teaching about the Kingdom of God. And folks are confused.

In contrast to the behavior of the scribes, we find this widow who comes into the temple in the midst of folks showing off what large sums of money they are giving and gives all that she has left - two small copper coins - think two pennies - without any show at all. And Jesus turns to his disciples and says that this - this is what the Kingdom of God is about - not doing something for show, but giving from heart.

The problem with this text, like so many in Scripture, is how it has been abused over the years. It has become a call during months like this, focused on stewardship, to become a call to give away all that you have - just like the widow. Breath, church, because that is not where the Spirit lead me with this message this morning.

What if this scripture isn't about *how much* you give, rather about asking the question *how are we behaving as followers of Jesus?* Why? Because Jesus calls the scribes out not for who they are - as in their vocation - but for their behavior. And Jesus praises the behavior of the widow - not just how much she gave in comparison to what she had but how she gave.

Jesus is speaking to his disciples about the behavior of the scribes. The same disciples who have heard whispers behind their back about how other people perceive how their Messiah is behaving and they are behaving. We have been working our way through The Chosen in The Story Sunday School. In season two, there is an episode where Matthew is trying to get the attention of some of the newer disciples who hear a pharisee preaching in the square about beware of false leaders. When he finally gets them aside, he explains that the pharisee is teaching about them - that he feels like Jesus is a false leader, a false Messiah - and as a result, they have a target on their back. The pharisee doesn't like Jesus's teaching or the behavior of the disciples that he doesn't discern as righteous, and as a result he is out to get them.

In telling the disciples to beware of the scribes when they fail to act in godly ways, Jesus is asking the question of them - how are you behaving? Are you behaving in a way that honors the Kingdom of God? Or are you getting distracted by all the people talking behind your back? Are you acting in hypocritical ways, like some of the scribes, or are you walking in a way that brings honor and glory to God alone?

Friends, those aren't just questions that Jesus is asking to the disciples - they are questions to us as well today - how are we behavior? Are we acting in hypocritical ways?

We all know people who seem to have all of the right answers, yet their behavior doesn't match what they proclaim. What if our stewardship isn't just about what we give in the offering box, but about how we act with the totality of our lives?

One of the things that we often lift up during the time of offering here at Juniata is how God wants us to be good stewards over our time, our treasure, and our resources. God wants us to be a good stewards of the words we say, places we go, and how we show up in the world. And that, my friends, is truly being self-giving.

Yet, how many times do we compromise what we give to God in stewardship?

Consider, Psalm 4: 6-7, There are many who say, "*O that we might see some good. Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!*" *You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound.* Yet how many times do we show up in our daily lives or at the dinner table or at a meeting where we are not proclaiming the goodness of the Lord?

Or 2nd Corinthians 8:9, where Paul writes, "*For you know the generous act[a] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*" Yet, how often do we focus our words and thoughts on what we don't have instead of what we do?

Or 1st Corinthians 13: 1-3, "*If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast[a] but do not have love, I gain nothing.*" Where yes, we may give, but do we give in love or give to show off to other people?

Friends, there are so many ways that our behavior reflects our heart, that is caught up more in looking good instead of genuinely giving.

Maybe, just maybe, the widow shows us what sacrificial behavior looks like even more than sacrificial giving. Maybe it wasn't about how much she gave, but the heart in which she gave.

We are now nearing the end on our series on stewardship. In each of your bulletins you should have received a stewardship card. I want you to go home and pray over this piece of paper before filling it out. I want you to pray to God about your heart and behavior way more than what number you write down. Let us set aside the way of compromising our stewardship to God and pick up the way of the widow -the way of sacrificial behavior. Amen.