

## **Sermon Text – Sunday, November 7, 2021 – Pastor Paula Kraus**

**OT Reading: Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17, Epistle Reading: Hebrews 9:24-28,  
Gospel Reading for Message: Mark 12:35-44 – Values?**

First, I don't want us to think of this scripture as a lesson on tithing. Your decision to tithe and your offerings are between you and God. Next week we will look at the budget and at that time you must reflect on your offerings and tithes that support God's work through this church.

Let's talk about the highlights of this scripture – I struggle here. Why does Jesus question calling the Messiah the son of David? He hasn't rejected himself being called Son of David so I wonder what Jesus wants us to learn. Actually I had to do some research and look at what other, more intelligent people than I, felt about the first three verses in this passage. Of course no one really knows what Jesus had in mind when he quotes from Psalm 110. But clues are found in what he quotes, "The LORD [meaning God] said to my LORD [the messiah] sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet" then Jesus points out that David calls the Messiah LORD – how could the Messiah be the actual Son of David, what 'father' would call his son Lord? This should make the crowd think. Jesus isn't rejecting the claim that the Messiah comes from the lineage of David, only that there is more to the story. We read in the book of Ruth that David's great-grandmother was not Jewish, she was a foreigner. Maybe Jesus tries to tell the people that they cannot claim Jesus as exclusively belonging to their clans. They cannot wear that as a banner for self-glorification.

So, when Jesus continues with his teaching by warning the crowd about the "teachers of the law" or the Scribes, this continues that theme of not having exclusive access to the Messiah. These 'teachers' exalt themselves taking the best seats and places of honor, they climb over others, foreigners, widows and orphans, to reach the top and are more concerned with appearance than how they treat others. The focus they have on the Messiah being the Son of David is also a way of exalting themselves. Their Messiah has royal lineage – meaning pure Jewishness, their Messiah will reinstate the true Kingdom and oust the Roman Gentiles and other foreigners. Jesus illustrates that these are the ones who would be first and they will receive the greater condemnation.

But Jesus does not stop his teaching by pointing out the hypocrisy of these teachers of the law. Now he sits opposite the treasury and watches the crowd placing their tithes and offerings. Many of the 'rich' make a display of putting in large sums. Jesus however praises the woman who gives what is the equivalent of one penny. I don't think it is her generosity he praises, I don't think this is an

example of giving money. When we take this all into context Jesus may be praising this woman because she is the true Messianic example, not one who will establish a Davidic Kingdom for the Jewish people but a Messiah who sacrifices everything for the world. She mimics the one who exhibits total trust in God's plan.

There is no condemnation here, there is nothing wrong with paying attention to your appearance and taking pride in how you look, how you act, and how you contribute to the kingdom. Jesus points to motivation – the scribes were motivated by what their appearance and their giving said about them. Is that what motivates us? The actions of the scribes or teachers said more about what they valued than about their feelings toward the messiah or Christ. Remember Jesus has already taught that many who would be first will be last and the last first.

It is important to note that these events occur after Jesus has already entered Jerusalem and cleared the temple of money changers, etc. (Mark 11: 12-17). So when Jesus sits 'opposite' the treasury maybe we should pay attention not only to his physical location but also his theological location of opposing what is going on in the institution of the Temple Treasury. Jesus may have opposed the temple tax and the way the temple used the money given. Jesus knew, in fact in the scripture immediately following what we read today he explains to his disciples, that the temple would be destroyed and he explains the things that would follow. Jesus opposes the fact that the temple system as it existed in that day was a corrupt system, one designed to advantage the rich and oppress the poor, like that widow. I wonder what this woman's giving would be like if she also knew what Jesus knows?

In that light, what does this woman's giving mean? She gives everything she has to a system that Jesus knows is corrupt. She is an unwitting victim of that system. Jesus opposes the oppression of the poor and widows. The Temple Treasury is a classic example of an oppressive system.

When we think about this scripture, in light of the others we have read over the past several weeks, the 'rich young ruler' and 'Blind Bartimaeus', what are the lessons we hear? Is Jesus telling us we have to give 100% of our belongings? Is it about money at all?

I think that once again Jesus teaches us lessons derived from what we know, examples of everyday living, but Jesus' means something broader. Jesus shows his disciples and us what it costs to follow him. Jesus would have us understand that following him is not without hardship. Ours is the narrow path, not some cakewalk down the wide and easy road. Because we follow Jesus we will experience difficulties in life, we know there will be suffering because we follow one who suffered much more than we could imagine. Only those who are truly committed, truly willing to give all will be successful in this journey.

When you put all of this together you get the idea. Christianity is not a banner to wear for self-glorification. Jesus did not come to be claimed exclusively by one sector of society or by one religion – Jesus is the Messiah to all humankind. Are we willing to take the hard narrow road and make sacrifices to gain the blessings of eternity? What do we value, how do we follow Jesus?

What are the scriptures we read today really about? We can say they are about caring, who do we care for and why? How do we determine who is worthy of our compassion? In our story from Ruth it did not matter to Naomi or Boaz that Ruth was a foreigner, she was cared for as family. However to the “teachers of the law” that Jesus spoke about, they cared more about what Jesus’ ancestry was and held on to the Messiah being the “Son of David” as if it were a badge of honor. Jesus rejected that idea because it leaves out the other, the foreigner, it leaves us out as well. Who are we willing to leave out? Who do we consider unworthy?

We can say that the message here is about giving, what are we willing to give to God? What does it mean to give ‘everything’ when others may not notice or even care? What does it mean to care enough about an organization or institution [such as a church] that you dedicate everything for it? What does it mean to come to church week after week, year after year, bringing your tithes, your food donations, and helping others when it seems like church leadership is only interested in building maintenance and security? How do these things play out in your life?

We can say that the message is about what is in our hearts and how we trust God and God’s promises to care for us. Jesus does not praise this woman for giving 100% of her income, in fact that must have been difficult for Jesus to see because Jesus knew this would leave her destitute. He was praising her heart for trusting God enough to give all she had to live on. The judgment for those rich people who put in large sums was their motive for doing so. The indication is that they delighted in having people SEE how much money they gave. But the lesson is not about percentage of income, giving comes from the heart – it’s not the bright shiny exterior that Jesus sees it’s what inside our hearts. It’s about our values and about trusting God and God’s promises enough to conquer what stands in the path to eternity.

Some churches dress themselves up, fancy exteriors, gold settings and candelabra, bright shiny fixtures thinking that money attracts money. And unfortunately in a way it does, but what matters most in a church is not the outward appearance of the building or meeting spaces, what matters most is the inward appearance of the people – the people are the church. Recently we talked about what do we want Jesus to do for us, and we need to focus on the answer

to that question. Why do we give, why do we work for the church – what motivates us? Jesus knows the answers to these questions what Jesus did when he observed the people putting their offering in the Temple treasury – was observe their motives.

Are we like these Scribes who parade around in their religiosity, wanting to be first, wanting to be honored but devouring widows' homes? Are we the ones who, when disagreeing with decisions in the church, withhold our offerings until we get what we want? Are we the ones who focus narrowly on what Jesus can do for us? What do we value – what idol are we serving – God or Mammon?

I think the lesson for all of us is one of humility and motivation. Jesus is reminding us that we must remove the barriers to a full relationship with God before we can enter the Kingdom. Abandon concern with appearance and status to serve even the lowliest and most vulnerable. Welcome the stranger as the women in her neighborhood welcomed Ruth and the son she bore to Boaz. Embrace others as Jesus has embraced us. We can be like the woman who gave everything she had remembering the promise of a multitude of blessings in eternity. Trusting God enough to be willing to sacrifice and knowing that God cares. What is it we value?