

Transcript of Reading and sermon – Sunday 24 May 2020

Love pays Attention. The last shall be first.

Good morning, this is Cynthia Strovos. I'll be reading today from Mark 10:17-23 and Mark 12:41-44.

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

Mark 12: 41-44

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

Hear the Word of the Lord.

Bevan Sylvester preaching:

Good morning everybody.

It's that time of the week again, when we can be together in this strange but meaningful way. I trust that you have had a good week and I trust that you and your loved ones are still safe and healthy at this stage.

Cynthia Strovos has read two messages from Mark's gospel for us today. These passages stand in contrast to each other and it's not difficult to see why. The first one deals with the rich young ruler. In the other Gospels, we will see that in only some places is he referred to as young and only some Gospels refer to him as rich. So we have to compare all the passages dealing with him to come to the conclusion that he was rich, that he was young, and that he was a man. He came to Jesus with a very fascinating question, he ran up to Jesus saying, "Teacher, Teacher, what do I have to do to have eternal life?" It is quick for us to see that he was very much one of the "haves" in New Testament times. He had status, prestige and wealth. Having was a very important concept to him. To have something was what made all the difference. I hope that I'm not reading too much into the passage when I surmise that he probably was hoping to, in some weird way, buy eternal life.

Jesus' answer shocked him to the core, for Jesus' answer didn't suit him at all. Jesus' suggestion was that he sell all that he had and give that money to the poor. It is recorded very sadly, that he was very unhappy having heard those words from Jesus' mouth. So unhappy, that he turned around and walked away. Whether Jesus was leading him into a bit of a test or not remains unknown, what we do know however is that this young man

attached too much value to the possessions he had acquired, to the wealth he had built up. The challenge that Jesus put to him clearly had one aim, and that was to make him realize very definitely that all of his riches could come crashing down at the drop of a hat, and that he should not attach his life's value to that which he had collected. He was finding his security, his name, his safety, perhaps even his identity in his possessions, and Jesus knows how dangerous that can be.

The second passage, that deals with the widow's mite, is a glaring contrast to the first passage. We see this woman came to the temple courts to bring her offering. She did this after all the rich and famous had lined up to offer all their cheques and credit cards. What they had presented had been very impressive. Gifts by the thousands, paper money if there was such a thing back in the day. I'm also almost sure that as the rich and famous came up to bring their offering, they would make absolutely certain that those running the temple and the religious leaders, would know exactly how much they had put in. It was a pride thing, you see. Then this woman came in her humility and put in the temple jar all she had. Some scholars who did research found that what she gave was very little indeed. In fact it was a sixteenth of a penny. But if this passage teaches us anything, it would be that little is much when God is in it.

Jesus was so impressed by this woman's sacrifice that he called his disciples aside and he gave them the clear message which stood out for him so heart wrenchingly, that what she had given was worth much more than all of the gifts that were previously given put together. For this woman gave from a deep place inside of her, she had made that presentation from her heart. And as you and I always discover and know by now, that there's nothing that matters more to God than the heart. We are told that this woman had very little, she was a widow which means that she no longer had a husband, he had died, and she was now without a bread winner, so the question that hangs in the air is how much could she have possible had to live on day to day? Who did she rely on for an income? Jesus was ever after something much deeper than the superficial; Jesus was also wanting yet again, to challenge a system that had become oppressive and unjust. For in no society should any person, let alone a widow, be left with such limited means, to the extent that her life was threatened and her future uncertain.

Jesus had lots to say about the New Testament system, where there was a widening gap between rich and poor, between the haves and the have-nots. That is why it is so significant that we put these passages side by side today and study them together; for they speak loudly into our reality of the current time. One of the struggles for me in the Covid19 crisis has been the glaring difference and separation between the haves and have-nots of this world. Even as we speak we have people starving without food and without water. Let's focus for a little while on the positive, however. We see that in this passage that no matter what one gives, it is how one gives that makes all the difference. It is the place from where one gives that tugs at the heartstrings of God. I said earlier that little is much when God is in it. We are called in these times to be compassionate, to be generous, and to give wherever we can, to offer help and hope to those who need it most. Perhaps we can think of Jesus-ways in how we can make this pandemic less stressful and less frightening for those who are in a place of severe and serious battle. Maybe our widow's mite can touch a life or two or ten? Who knows what God is able to do with our two fish and five loaves of bread? Perhaps more than ever before we are now called to live up to the discipline of Christian generosity. We can never fall into that awful trap of thinking that what we have to give is too little, too limited and too insignificant. That dear friend's is for God to decide.

So the invitation that I have come up with for myself and that I'm now sharing with you is this: Where will we be giving in this time of crisis and with what attitude are we going to be giving? For that is what matters to God. It looks like those who give millions from a place of wanting to impress and make a statement don't quite warm God's heart as profoundly as those who give little, but with humility and in sincerity. I have also been paralyzed by the overwhelming need out there, and I have almost reached that place of thinking that all is lost

and that I'm not going to bother, but then the Holy Spirit stirred in my heart, reminding me who I am in Jesus, reminding me that it's always more blessed to give than to receive (according to Acts 20: 35). So I now share a little of the resources that I have to bring light into the darkness of others. Perhaps after listening to this sermon you can spend a little bit of time thinking of what you have available to yourself, and how you can offer that to the glory of God, by ministering to others in this difficult time. I have a funny feeling that God will make something beautiful of whatever you have available to give, and that God will multiply the gift that you offer.

It was Mother Teresa who said, "If you cannot feed a thousand people, feed one person." There is also a quote by Gandhi that comes to mind. He said, "It is better to light a candle rather than to curse the darkness." May we as Jesus people live up to these statements, that we are called, if not to feed the thousand people, to feed one person, that we are called to light candles in the darkness, particularly in this time of harrowing crisis where the future looks daunting for most. Let the widow's mite, that little sixteenth of a penny she dropped in the temple jar, be a powerful reminder that God can use even us and whatever seemingly insignificant gift we have to present. For we are a people of faith, we are a people of generosity, a people who bring hope in despair and light in the darkness. We are after all the people of God. Amen.