

“Where’s Jesus?”

Rev. Dr. Barbara Edema, Bridge Pastor
Sunday, November 11, 2018

Psalm 146, Mark 12:38-44

The temple was buzzing. Jesus was watching

Jesus is in the temple. He sees the main “stars” He sees the rich people dressed in their finest and depositing large gifts, they knew they were the ones to be watched and admired. There were also the Scribes. The religious leaders. The Clergy who had their names on the front of the bulletin. Special religious robes. Because Scribes weren’t paid by the synagogue, they received their high living by taking a little from offerings and from being guests in others’ homes.

Among all the important visible people, Jesus sees a woman. An older woman. She is not dressed beautifully. She’s a little too thin. Her hand is wrapped around something precious, she is carrying it carefully. When she gets to the treasury box, she pauses, then opens her hand and the two coins drop. She has given all she has.

Jesus in the temple for the last time.

Stewardship. We are right in the middle of our stewardship season. Next Sunday is the big day, the big push. We make our promises and then give our offerings.

Jesus was in the temple with his disciples. They had made it to Jerusalem after their long ministry in the countryside and villages, spreading good news, restored physical and spiritual health, and true hope for redemption.

Now he was where it would all end. Or perhaps, where it would all begin.

In four days, Jesus will be dead.

But do we want to make an example out of this woman?

But is it right to commend those with little to give everything to the institution of the church?

To be clear, no where in this passage does Jesus praise the woman for what she gave. He just points it out. She gives all she has. There is nothing left. The life of a woman without anyone to depend on was a life of desperation. A life of scrimping. A life of scraping together what she could to live until tomorrow. And yet, she came to church and gave to the treasury her small treasure.

Was it fair for her to give one hundred percent of what she had for those who sometimes took advantage of the poor under the guise of religious elite?

Is it right for places like Jimmy Swaggart Ministries to prey on the elderly and not-so-elderly to sell all they possess and give all they have to him?

The widow in our story today did more than the rich young man did earlier in Mark’s gospel. He was unable to part with his possessions. She parted with absolutely everything.

Is this the message we want to give? I don’t want the stewardship committee to be angry, but I say no. The poor are not responsible for the church’s existence. But the church is responsible for the existence of the poor.

This cannot be a message to congregations anywhere that every member must give out of their poverty. For those who can give – amen! For those who can’t – no guilt.

What Jesus sees.

Jesus sees the scribes in their fancy robes and their haughty demeanors. Some of them, certainly not all, have learned to work the system. They know how to get the best of everything from those

who want their earthly blessing. They know how to turn a phrase, give a look, make a promise or a threat, and bamboozle those are at their mercy. "Beware of the scribes!" Jesus says.

Jesus is watching the temple and those who are giving to the treasury. The rich give rich gifts. He doesn't judge, he sees.

Then he sees the widow. She is not loud, colorful, anything to look at all. She blends in with the stones of the temple. She comes to the box with her coins held gently in her hands. She is the one he has to point out to his disciples because she is an invisible one. One of the many in society people spend a lot of energy trying not to see. Jesus makes her visible. Jesus points her out because she matters. SHE MATTERS. The disciples see her. In her ragged clothes with her thin body that hasn't had a decent meal since who knows when. They see her with her hand holding something precious. And then, plunk. She let's her small coins drop, mixed in with much larger gifts.

Perhaps Jesus sees himself in this poor woman. Perhaps it's because he knows in four days, he will give all he has, his life. She has emptied herself and so will he. He will give all he has for a world that knows nothing of it, and those who do don't get it. And yet, he will drop all of himself in the eternal treasury, so the world will be saved.

So how shall we live? Who might we see? Where's Jesus?

As easy as it is to see the "stars of the show" those people who have all the sparkling speaking parts. Those who are the loudest and wear the best costumes. But we are called to make the invisible visible. We are called to see those who are Standing off to the side. Those who know how to dance but are never asked. Those who would love to say something out loud but are always quieted by someone else.

It takes work. It means we have to pay attention. We must seek and find the least of these. Because that is the topsy-turvy world Jesus Christ left us with when he left all of himself on the cross.

I have seen some people waiting in the wings. Maybe I was thinking about his sermon, so they became more visible. I don't want my eyes to give out on me after I say amen today. I want to continue to see Jesus in the world.

I saw a woman at the food bank who takes her allotment of food and cooks for her invalid neighbors. I saw Jesus.

I've seen the tired mother buying Christmas presents for her three children, then gave several of them to another mother on an even tighter budget. I saw Jesus.

I heard the quiet young man say he would like to pass out Thanksgiving dinners to those suffering with HIV and AIDS this holiday. I saw Jesus.

Good people in this church filled backpacks with food for school children who live in hunger over the weekends. They are Jesus.

I have to believe there are those who show migrant children, locked in a tent city some kindness and empathy. They are Jesus.

I saw the picture of the sheriff who ran into the Borderline Bar in Thousand Oaks, CA while bullets flew to try and save lives, losing his own in the process. He was Jesus. He gave it all.

When we search for Jesus, we find him in the ones who are always giving something away. Where's Jesus, he's the one giving away her heart, a hug, his patience, her joy. You'll know for sure it's Jesus when the person he is interacting with is obviously on the receiving end of love.

That's the way it works when the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

Amen.