

The Widow's Mite – Mark 12:38-44  
Trinity Episcopal Church  
November 8, 2009. 9:00 a.m.  
The Rev. Charles A. de Kay

*Lord, give us courage to walk out in faith, one step at a time, growing day by day in our love and faith in you, that one day we might become skilled runners, deeply trusting in your steadfast love for us with joy and holy abandon. In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.*

Please be seated.

Good morning!

We are creatures of habit, you and I. Not only do we tend to want to park in the same spot every Sunday morning we come to church, and sit in the same seat in church and at coffee hour, but we are habitual in the very manner of living which shape how we live. What do I mean by that? Well, as much as we become comfortable resting our bones and our cars in one place or another, so, too do we tend to rest our perception of the world with one set of lenses. We choose to see the world one way, from a variety of choices, and we can even be so comfortable in our vantage point that we forget, we don't even realize, we've made a choice. It can be challenging to see things differently when we don't change our perspective.

In the Gospels, including today's story of the widow's mite, Jesus continually challenges us to see the world anew. He invites us to break out of our comfortable habits of seeing things from one perspective – a limited, often fear-based perspective – to giving us a glimpse of a more faithful, God-centered perspective.

The Widow's Mite, yes, indeed, it's a story about giving. It's a story about money. And here we are in stewardship season, so the preacher's going to talk about how much we should be giving to the church, yes? Well, not this morning. Relax. This is not a stewardship sermon.

For the story is also about how appearances can be deceiving. How our comfortable vantage point can lead us to miss the big picture. The disciples – us – were (then and now) apt only to see that the widow had given a very small amount of money, as compared with her wealthier neighbors. That is, presuming we noticed her at all. Our habit is to value the amount of money. Now, what did she give? A penny's worth! How much is a penny, today? Hardly worth bending down to pick up off the street, right?

Ah, but if it's all you have in the world... what then? It's all you have in the world, right? It's everything.

This woman, we don't know anything about her age, what she looks like, what she's wearing, we only know her socio-economic status – she's a poor widow. She's poor and, what's worse, she has no means of making a living, as her husband has died. The bible talks a lot about orphans and widows, because they were utterly powerless, dependent people in the ancient world. They had no voice, no standing in the community, and no way to earn money. They were utterly dependent upon others – they live or die depending on the charity and good will of others. Their lives were visibly, undeniably, and wholly in God's hands.

Jesus draws our attention, as disciples in training, to what we are apt to miss in this scene. The poor tend to be invisible. We habitually don't see them. If we were to see them, we might actually have to help them. If we make eye contact they might ask us for money. Sometimes they're smelly. Occasionally, in desperation, they might do something dangerous.

So it's easier, safer not to notice them. So, they are invisible to us. For most of us that's our comfortable, habitual vantage point.

Jesus makes this poor woman visible. He trains a spotlight on her. And he tells us of how much her little bit of money means. How she has given her whole livelihood, and how much more her gift to the Temple Treasury means than the larger sums of the others. Jesus offers us the perspective of what's going on in the people's hearts, rather than the perspective of the treasurer – noticing how much the temple was collecting that day. Jesus offers us a glimpse of God's perspective. And in changing the perspective, he teaches us, and challenges us to examine our own faith. How willing are we to put our whole trust, our very livelihood, in God's hands?

It's hard to give up the illusion of control. As long as we believe we have the power to control our lives, we've no incentive to put our trust in anyone else, much less in an unseen, invisible God. Unless we have something happen that propels us out of our comfortable, habitual parking spot from where we view the world, like the widow whose poverty (following the death of her husband) has pushed her hard into God's arms, usually, it's a little bit at a time. Baby steps.

Something happens, we are rudely awakened from the slumber of our habits, either by grace or by loss, and we step out in faith. If we can feel how we are held up, we take another, tentative step. Oh, so carefully. Oh, so reluctantly. But then, as we discover we are indeed being held up, loved, affirmed by this invisible God in a thousand tiny ways, invisible -- unless our perspective has changed so that we're now looking for it and can actually see them -- we begin to take more steps. We begin to train our own spotlights in new ways to see and to study what we ignored before, the scales fall from in front of our eyes, and we see God's Holy Light all around us. Everything is illuminated by God's presence. Once we were blind, but now we see.

In Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Bible, titled *The Message*, Jesus tells the disciples that they are there – that we are here -- “to bring out the God-colors in the world.” Once we catch sight of the wonder of God's presence all around us, our mission is to help others to break out of their habitual ways of seeing, too. Together, not alone, but together our faith is stronger, and we can continually be at work building each other up in faith, as we share the good news of God in Christ with the world.

And, if we step out in faith with baby steps today, one day we might be fortunate enough to live our lives like the poor widow, who in her poverty has the greatest gift of all – a compelling, empowering faith which trusts God completely. She knows that she doesn't need anything else. God, who is in charge, will take care of her today.

*Let us pray. Gracious God, bless us that we may be so lucky today, as to be shaken from our complacency, from our safe comfortable habitual ways of seeing the world, that we might take a small tentative step toward you, O Lord our God. May we entrust some dear piece of our lives into your loving hands. That we may discover the joy of your saving help once more. Amen.*