

Text: Mark 12:38-44  
Theme: "Seeing the Invisible"  
#979

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Today's lessons offer us quite a challenge. They cut to the heart of our humanity, contrasting it with the will and desire of God. As such, they are not easy to deal with, but are ones that we need to hear. When I think of Elijah, that great prophet of the OT, going out to a poor widow to ask for a meal, my first reaction is "What nerve! How can Elijah basically demand that this widow use her last morsels of food to feed him? What about *her*? What about *her child*? The widow was preparing a meal for herself and her son that would be their *last meal!* She was destitute, starving, and faced with no future. This was a tragic story.

The woman was not an Israelite, for Elijah was in a foreign country. He convinces her, however, to trust him and believe that if she gives up her last morsel, Elijah's God will provide them with enough to live on until the famine has passed.

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus notices a poor widow who places everything she had into the temple treasury. It wasn't much in comparison to the rich people who put in much larger amounts of money. She put in two copper coins-about a penny to us. Jesus tells the disciples that this

woman has contributed much more than all the other rich people who deposited large sums of money into the treasury.

Jesus then delivers a scathing criticism of the scribes who stood in judgment of the widow. The scribes, representing the religious authorities, enjoyed a high degree of public prominence and realized a comfortable lifestyle as a result of their position. Jesus accused the religious authorities of living off the backs of the poor and needy they were supposed to be helping. They demonstrated no care of the widows, and the command to ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ made little impact on their lives.

The widows in our two stories are important not so much because they were poor—or widows. What set them apart for us is their relative invisibility. Widows and the poor were not important to society and were, generally speaking, rather invisible to the religious authorities who were charged with caring for them. These two widows demonstrated great faith in God by **giving all they had** to further God’s work among them. The widow in Elijah’s story gave the last meal for herself and her son, trusting that what Elijah said was going to happen. He promised her that her food would not run out. She was in the midst of a famine—she and her son were starving to death, and there was no proof of more food to come. The widow in the Gospel gave her last two coins to the temple treasury to

further the work of God, so she believed. They both gave their all in faith that somehow, God would provide what was necessary for their survival.

Today we have the honor of remembering those who have served in the armed forces of the US from the Revolutionary War right up through Viet Nam, the Gulf War, and the current War on Terror. We remember their sacrifices—**many people** gave their lives for our freedom, many have had to deal with disabilities for the rest of their lives, and many more have made huge sacrifices that cannot be seen, but are carried deep inside. They have used their skills, grit, and determination to keep our country free and safe. These vets deserve our thanks and our full-fledged support for all the sacrifices they have made. Our country and our lives would be vastly different without their service.

As we think about trust and sacrifice in relation to these lessons today, the message for us is one of trusting in God to provide all that we need, whenever we need it. This involves giving ourselves fully and completely to God, giving our whole being in service to God and God's people as our vets have done for our country.

We are all called to serve. We are called to share, to help others, and to trust in God fully and completely, and not place our trust in ourselves or the riches and things of this world.

This is the difficult part of these stories. It's supremely difficult to place ***our full trust*** in God—especially when we are used to doing things for ourselves and taking care of ourselves. That's the Old Adam and Eve within each of us. God has given the world enough of everything; and in so doing God challenges us to make sure that those who are truly needy find those needs met.

So in essence, these texts can be seen also as mission texts, reminding us of those who are bereft of the essentials of daily life that we take for granted. It is difficult for us to see beyond ourselves or our immediate areas which makes people in other areas of the world sort of invisible to us.

When we experience a tragedy, and we have lived through far too many tragedies in the past few years, we naturally look to our faith to support us when we cannot do it on our own. We continue to struggle with violence and deeply disturbed people. We continue to struggle with our brothers and sisters who are fighting wild fires in California and hurricanes in the southern US. One of the blessings for me as I go on the mission trips to Jamaica is to see that there are other people beyond my own neighborhood who are in desperate need. The invisible poor around the world become real and I see them as brothers and sisters in Christ who are

struggling simply to survive. I am challenged to look beyond myself and my own neighborhood to see the needs of others worldwide. We get to know the people in Jamaica that we help. We eat with them, we serve alongside them, we hear their stories and learn of the struggles they have each day just to survive. It is a humbling experience to realize how much I have and see how much they do not have. Others who have helped in different places share similar stories.

How we can see everything we do as Christians in light of God's mission? Who are the invisible people who are suffering and hurting in our midst? Who are the seemingly invisible people in our country and throughout the world that stand in need of things we can provide? How can we share the love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, with those who haven't been as visible but still have needs? How can we stand with those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, gunned down in Thousand Oaks, CA, the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, and in so many other places? How can we stand with the people who have lost everything in wildfires and hurricanes?

Giving ourselves fully to God as these two women did is a difficult task. It is hard to understand sometimes, that we have been blessed to be a blessing to others, as God proclaimed to Abraham so long ago. Think

about these texts in a little different way this week: think about who might be the invisible ones that God is bringing to us, or who are the ones hurting and reeling from losses of many different kinds? How we might respond by placing our trust in God to serve Him in the course of each day and being open to serving others in Jesus' Name?

AMEN

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