

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today we find Jesus in the temple, the one “*made with hands,*” as He prepared to reenter the heavenly temple having made a sacrifice that “*put away sin*” “*once [and] for all.*” For our text takes place shortly before Jesus is betrayed into the hands of sinful men and hung as a sacrifice upon the tree.

Jesus was in the temple. He had entered into Jerusalem riding on that donkey’s foal, acclaimed the Son of David to shouts of “*Hosanna!*” In Jerusalem, Jesus went to the temple to continue His teaching. He had cleansed the temple, turning over tables and chasing out the moneychangers. And today, Jesus is back in the temple teaching and observing.

Now, none of this happens in the innermost part of the temple, the Holy Place, where the high priest would go to offer up prayers, or the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was, where even the High Priest went only once a year. Jesus couldn’t go there in this copy of the heavenly temple. Although He is our great High Priest, He was not a priest of the line of Aaron. Nor was Jesus in the temple courtyard where the Altar of Burnt Sacrifice was, where the animals were slaughtered and sacrificed! Being a man, Jesus was permitted to go into that area only during certain feast times.

No, the setting for Jesus’ teaching today was in the temple area called the Court of the Women. And after warning of the arrogant, snobbish scribes and their thievery even of widows, Jesus sat down in the courtyard next to a treasury, or an offering box, and observed the people.

Rich people came by and offered up great sums of money. Jesus observed it, but didn’t speak a word—neither of condemnation nor of commendation. Nor later did Jesus condemn the giving of those who had wealth, though the Scripture contains many warnings about wealth. You remember—it wasn’t long ago that we considered this text. You remember that earlier Jesus warned, “*How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!*” “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God*” (Mark 10:23, 25). And Jesus had taught about treasure saying, “*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matt. 6:21). And yet, about these “*rich people*” putting their “*large sums*” into the offering box, Jesus said not a word.

It was only when He observed a poor widow that He really took notice, and after watching her put her last two copper coins into the offering box, Jesus called His disciples over to teach them.

Jesus commended her for her generosity, not objectively for an amount that was greater than that which the rich people gave, but comparatively much more.

Jesus said, she “*has put in more than all*” the others, because she “*has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.*”

“How could she do that?” you might ask. Of all people, she surely had an excuse to give nothing! “I need it to live on! God will understand!” How could she do that? Jesus doesn’t tell us how she will fare afterward; He doesn’t say how blessed she is, and the Evangelist Mark doesn’t either!

Of course, she trusted that the Lord, who “*is good,*” whose “*steadfast love endures forever,*” who “*raises up the needy out of affliction,*” could indeed take care of her. She trusted in the promises of the Lord, perhaps like another widow, of whom she had probably heard, a widow, not even an Israelite, in another time and place, whom God took care of by providing a constant supply of flour and oil as she took care of the prophet Elijah!

Yes, surely this widow, though she is nameless to us, could be classified among the great examples of faith: Noah who built a huge ark on dry land at God’s foolish command; Abraham who obeyed God’s frightening command to move, he knew not where; Abraham and Sarah who believed God’s incredible promise that they would bear a son by whom all the world would be blessed; and Abraham again later as he endured God’s shocking command to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, the son of promise. And yet greater than these is this poor widow, who without explicit command or promise — only the promise of God’s great love for the afflicted — gave “*everything she had, all she had to live on.*”

And yet, it’s not because of her great faith that I find this poor widow intriguing, but because of whom she represents. For I see in her action Christ Himself. Who was it that gave up everything at the behest of the Father? Who was it so poor and lowly as to be born among the livestock, laid in a manger? Who was it was driven from His home to dwell in a foreign land because His life was in danger? Who was it in His ministry had nowhere to lay His head? Who was it arrested though He had committed no crime? Who was it mocked, scourged, humiliated, hung on a tree to die for sins He did not commit? Who gave everything He had, all He had to live on — His lifeblood, His very last breath—a “*sacrifice of Himself*” for the kingdom of God? As we will sing shortly of Christ, “At last He brought His offering And laid it on a tree; There gave Himself, His life, His love For all humanity” (LSB787:4).

Yes, see in this widow the incredible thing Christ has done for you— He who “*was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich*” (2 Cor. 8:9). Then see in the widow a great example of trust in the Lord as you yourselves consider your response to His love. Yes, this week, ending with next Sunday, you are asked to ponder with prayer all that God has done for

you in Christ and all the ways He has blessed you, and then you're asked to return the pledge card. I pray you will.

You may have an abundance; I pray you will pledge and give generously, even sacrificially; you may be poor; your gift may be mainly in your hands and feet that help around the church, your bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord (Rom. 12:1). I praise the Lord for both kinds of sacrifice, and for still another: the sacrifice of praise, "*the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name*" (Heb. 13:15).

And although in Jesus' day people would sit around the treasury in the temple and watch the people putting in their coins, I'll not do that myself. I'll not check on you. Oh, yes, there will those who will compile the numbers and report, but I'll not do that. That will be between you and the Lord. I will simply trust the Lord that He will care for His church, His Zion, through you. I'm confident He will.

And so I will close simply with a prayer—again from our first distribution hymn: "Lord, help us all, with You, to yield Whatever love demands And freely give, as You have giv'n With open hearts and hands."

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.