

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

1Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, should I not seek a home for you, that it may be well with you? 2Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maidens you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.” 5And she replied, “All that you say I will do.”

13So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. 14Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next of kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! 15He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.” 16Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. 17And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Psalm 127 or Psalm 42 (UMH 777)

Hebrews 9:24-28

24For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. 25Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; 26for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, 28so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Mark 12:38-44

38And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places 39and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, 40who devour widows’ houses and

for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”
41And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. 43And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living.”

Revised Standard Version of the Bible

The Widow's Mite

She was a woman. She was poor. These are two facts anyone could tell that day in the Court of the Women in the Temple in Jerusalem. She was also a widow who was down to her last two coins. These are facts that Jesus also knew about her. She was a woman of great faith. She became a living sermon. She remains an icon of faith as she put her whole trust in God, not holding anything back.

This unnamed woman is known now by her marital status and her coins rather than her name, for the story is “*The Widow's Mite*” and she is “*The Widow*.” Yet we should be careful to note that it is the story of “*The Widow's Mites*” as the woman had two small coins. Each of her coins were worth one four-hundredth of a shekel or what we might think of as an eighth of a penny each. Too small to bear a legible imprint, they were the lowliest of coins in the empire of Rome.

Jesus and the disciples gathered at the Temple. Jesus was teaching and there were crowds all around. It wasn't unusual for teachers to sit where they were sitting. Jesus had chosen to sit in the area between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women in an area called the Beautiful Gate. This way both Jews and Gentiles alike could hear his teaching.

In this area, there were thirteen contraptions called "the trumpets." They were called "the trumpets" because that's what they were shaped like. They were big funnel shaped contraptions into which the people threw their offerings. Each one had a special purpose, such as to buy corn or wine or oil for the sacrifices. They were collection boxes used to support the day to day expenses of the Temple. When I think of the trumpets, I picture that thing in the lobby of the McDonalds near my house. When we take our granddaughter Kayla to McDonalds, we give

her pennies to put into the thing. She watches as they spin around and around and make noise until they finally disappear down the hole in the middle. I think the money they collect goes to the Ronald McDonald House

These offering contraptions were in a more or less public place. Some people, especially some of the wealthy scribes and Pharisees, would come along and chunk in large contributions consisting of lots of coins that would rattle and clank and make all kinds of noise as they rolled around the mouth and then down the neck of "the trumpet." Now, there was - and is - nothing wrong with large contributions. However, these folks threw in their large contributions with lots of fanfare and noise, hoping that "the trumpet" WOULD sound so that everyone would notice just how much they had given.

So, picture what is going on. The Temple was always busy. There was always a bunch of things going on. Not only were people making sacrifices and teaching classes and preaching, but just outside the gate where Jesus sat were the money changers and the merchants with their birds and goats and lambs for the sacrifices. Plus, the Temple was a tourist stop. You couldn't go to Jerusalem without stopping at the Temple. Everybody and their uncle stopped to see the Temple. Families came and gawked, while their relatives described all that was going on around them.

Let me try to describe what the Temple looked, sounded, and smelled like.

Imagine the mall on Christmas Eve with all the cash registers going at once. Add to this the livestock auction barn with all the animal noises and smells - plus five or six auctioneers trying to shout out each other. Include the crowd at a football game on a Friday night. Then add the cooking smells from about a dozen bad greasy spoons, coupled with a few candles, potpourri and cheap perfume stores. Add several groups filled with the excitement and confusion of a trip to Lagoon. Throw in a few Sunday School classes in hot debate, and one or two T.V. evangelists. This is probably pretty close to the atmosphere of the Temple on a good day.

Jesus and the disciples sat in the midst of all this noise and confusion, teaching while a widow made her way to the gate with her meager offering. Over this cacophony of noise Jesus heard this widow's two small coins go into one of "the

trumpets."

Partly it was odd because of all the noise, but it was even odder because they were two such small coins and they wouldn't have made much noise at all. And the widow wouldn't have wanted to draw attention to herself. You see all she gave was the bare minimum gift that could even be given as prescribed by Rabbinic Law. Not only that, it was only one eighth of what was to be given to any traveling beggar asking for a handout. No, the widow wouldn't have wanted anyone to see that she had less than any common beggar.

But our Savior knew. Our Savior heard her gift of those two small coins above the cooing of the doves, the baaing of the sheep and even above the braying of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus heard the poor widow's gift of those two coins as they quietly jingled against "the trumpet."

No one else heard them hit, but the sound of those coins resonated throughout heaven and Jesus heard. Jesus heard and praised her by saying, *"Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."*

Jesus knew that these are not any two coins, but the woman's last two coins. The text says, *"All she had to live on,"* but the Greek is starker still. What is really said is that she put in her "bios." It's the word from which we get "biology," the study of life. For Jesus tells us that the widow put her "life" into the temple treasury that day. I like what Benjamin Franklin wrote in *Poor Richard's Almanac*:

*If your riches are yours,
why don't you take them with you to the other world.*

The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy contains a passage that talks about tithing. Deuteronomy 14:22-23 states that: *"You must tithe all of your crops every year. Bring this tithe to eat before the Lord your God at the place He shall choose as His sanctuary; this applies to your tithes of grain, new wine, olive oil, and the firstborn of your flocks and herds. The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives."* (TLB) Did you hear that last bit? Let me say it again:

The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives. It's not about the money, its about putting God first in your life.

But this is not a sermon about tithing, because the woman did not give ten percent of her income. The mites were her last two coins to rub together, and rather than keep one back, she tossed both into the temple treasury's coffers. The widow gave 100 percent of her money. The widow was down to two practically worthless little coins, and she trusted it all to God. If this were a gamble, then the widow would be laying all her money on God. But this was not a gamble, for the widow did not bet her money; she trusted her life to God.

It would be nice if Mark filled in more details for us. Was Jesus' arm around the woman as he said, "*This poor widow has put in more ...*" or was the woman blending back into the crowd, never to be seen again? Or perhaps Jesus asked his own keeper of the purse, Judas Iscariot, to give something to this woman so that she would not go hungry that evening. Or better still, did the widow come to be a Christ follower? Did she join with the other women who journeyed with Jesus from Galilee to the cross and beyond?

The Gospel never answers these questions. The nameless widow who gave two small coins fades into the background. We may want to know her name in order to name churches, schools, and hospitals in her honor. We may want to give her a place of honor in Jesus' stories alongside disciples whose names we know, though their trust in God wasn't always so exemplary.

But perhaps namelessness is appropriate for this living parable. And maybe it is best, too, that we don't find out how her story ends. The nameless woman whose ultimate fate we never know is perhaps an even better icon of trust, for her story was a precarious one. She went to the temple that day not knowing if she would ever have two little coins to call her own again. It could have been her path to a life of begging or even a station on the road to starvation.

But in facing an uncertain future, the widow reached out to God. She trusted that if she gave everything she had to God, even the little she gave would be honored. And whether she was repaid handsomely by Jesus himself, or God cared for her in some other way, we, too, have to trust. We trust that the widow's story turned out all right. We trust that whether she lived or died, she was God's.

And by her example, Jesus shows that what we withhold may matter more than what we offer. The widow was a woman of great faith, who held nothing back. She knew what Jesus' disciples were just learning: we are to give, knowing that everything we have is God's already. We can't give God anything. But we can offer our very selves to God, holding nothing back.

She was a woman. She was poor. She was a widow down to her last two coins. She was a child of God who placed her whole life back in her loving creator's hands.