

Worship Service for November 7th: 24th Sunday after Pentecost - Remembrance Sunday

- **Old Testament:** 1 Kings 17:8–16
- **New Testament:** Mark 12:38-44
- **Psalms:** Psalm 127

Announcements:

- **Wednesday November 17th:** Bible Studies Acts 1 in St. George's P. C at 7pm.
- **Sunday November 21st:** 4-H Sunday Service

Sermon Title: Scribes Vs Widows!

Today, Jesus is continuing his teaching from last week, teaching in Jerusalem where he is revealing more about himself and the Kingdom of God. In his teaching today, Jesus starts with a warning “beware – take heed of the scribes. Who were the scribes and why was Jesus warning people to take heed of them?”

The organization of the scribes began at the time of the prophet Ezra. They began as transcribers of God's law and later became interpreters of the Torah. They produced legal documents, recorded deeds, etc. and could act as notaries, public and court secretaries. They were considered honoured professionals and in today's world they would be considered as judges or lawyers.

It was the custom of the Jews to have a prayer shawl that they would put on each time they recited their prayers, but the scribes specially made prayer shawls that were full length like robes that would touch the ground. These shawls had ornate tassels on the end of them, and these robes or shawls portrayed the lofty status that these professors enjoyed in the community. The scribes loved the best seats in the synagogues, which were benches along the sides. The common people sat on the floor and the scribes sat on the comfortable benches and sought the best places at the feasts.

And Jesus said watch out for this people because they devour widows' houses. The widows and orphans were the most vulnerable people in the society in Jesus' day and God always commanded that they be taken care of. How did the scribes devour widows' resources? Historical evidence suggests the following ways:

- They took payment from widows for providing legal assistance even though it was forbidden.

- As lawyers, they cheated on the wills or mismanaged the estates of the widows.
- Some of them were known to take advantage of the hospitality offered to them by the widows.
- Praying for widows became a business transaction for some.
- And if they couldn't afford their services, some of the scribes were known to take the widow's homes as payment for their services.

Jesus is advising the people to see the scribes as they truly are. Don't be deceived but see the truth about them. They might look impressive, they might love the regular greetings they receive in the market places as befitting one of status and influence; they might like the best seats where they can see and be seen, seats of honour at all the important dinners with all the important people but see them as they truly are because all of this speaks to a heart posture that stands in sharp contrast with Jesus and the values of the Kingdom of God.

The scribes like the best seats at the best feasts while Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners. Where they are hailed in the marketplaces, Jesus is called upon by the blind and the lepers and this theme of posture is so important in the gospel of Mark. In the scribes we see pride and self-importance rather than the humility that marks the way of Jesus and the values of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus continues his warning in verse 40 and it is clear that the scribes have little value and concern for the lowly which is a sharp contrast to what Jesus has been teaching in the last couple of chapters of Mark. Jesus is concerned for the children, asking that his disciples let them come to him and he is concerned for the blind, taking time to stop on his way to Jerusalem to heal blind Bartimaeus. He teaches about becoming a servant if you want to be great and to love God with all your being and love your neighbour as yourself.

In the eyes of Jesus, those people who are considered of no importance have great importance whereas the scribes have no time for women with no social standing. Mark is also making a connection between social justice and religious hypocrisy. For Jesus, you cannot separate love for God with social justice just as you can't separate the love of God and the love for one's neighbour as we saw last week. And Jesus ends by saying that they will be judged for it. God sees them and they will be held into account and justice will prevail.

In the same passage that we have read today, Jesus brings us to another scenario of people giving money in the temple. And we are told that Jesus sat there in the temple opposite the treasury and watched the crowd put money in the treasury. One important thing to note here is the fact that Jesus watches what people do with their money; he watches what we do with our money. It matters to him how we use our money.

Mark explains that the rich people give large amounts of money while the widow gives a very small amount. Jesus unpacks it for the disciples, “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.”

Some theological scholars in talking about this statement have said that “the quantity of possessions does not count in the Kingdom’s audits.” And another scholar makes the statement that “the Kingdom of God is not for sale.” For a world where money equals status, Mark is telling us that it is the contrary in the Kingdom of God. In God’s Kingdom, money doesn’t equal status and even though it may seem like that in our churches and that those who tithe the most have the greatest influence, that is not the teaching of Jesus. For Jesus, heart posture matters significantly more than quantity, generosity more than being wealthy, humility more than importance. And he is also teaching that how we steward the money that God has entrusted to us speaks volumes about the posture of our hearts.

In this passage Mark is making a juxtaposition between the scribes and the widows. And Jesus is teaching here that the problem of the scribes here is the posture of their hearts. They are concerned about appearances and influence and don’t have a concern for the lowly and the poor, neither are they concerned about the Kingdom of God and how it is represented. In contrast, those who are the actual poor and lowly like the widow, have a heart posture of generosity and give out of an overflowing heart posture.

What Mark is trying to impress on us through Jesus’ teaching is that humility is the primary value in the Kingdom of God and that it is the humble posture of the heart that serves as a marker of status in God’s Kingdom. And this stands in sharp contrast to the values of the world where money, status, education, influence, and connections are markers of status.

Today Jesus is teaching us as his followers to give generously out of a posture of humility for the sake of others. And like I said last week, Jesus always practices what he preaches, and we see that as he goes to the cross and gives himself generously out of the overflow of a heart filled with love for the sake of you and me. Jesus is calling on us to do the same, to give, to serve, to love with humble hearts because that is the only thing that matters in God's Kingdom. May the Holy Spirit help us hear, embrace and apply God's Word in our lives today and always. Amen.

Prayer

God of all the ages past, hope of years to come: We gather in this season of remembrance, grateful that you hold each one of us in your memory and your mystery, now and for all the time to come. Today, we remember all those who have served to uphold justice and freedom in the wars of the last century, in conflicts of our own generation, and in peacekeeping and relief efforts around the world. Especially we pray for those who have died in this service and for those who carry scars on body and soul, having returned from conflict. We remember their courage and we pray for their families who still ache for lives surrendered at a great cost. Faithful God, remember them now and for all the time to come.

O God, we remember before you the victims of conflict, hiding in forgotten corners of the world, longing for safety and peace. Especially we pray for people in Afghanistan who fear for their lives and their future. We remember victims of violence in our own country, still fearful and uncertain about what the future holds for them. Give us the courage to speak out for their protection and recovery. Faithful God, remember them now and for all the time to come.

O God, we remember those around us who struggle to remember day by day; those who must cope with the fear of forgetting those who matter most to them, and those who face the fear of being forgotten. Help us remember to reach out in comfort and support so that no one is forgotten. Faithful God, remember them now and for all the time to come.

O God, we remember those around us who carry on under the burden of sad and hard memories; those weighed down by grief, disappointment, anger, pain and loss. Inspire us to offer a listening ear and an understanding heart whenever we can.

Faithful God, remember them now and for all the time to come.

O God, receive our gifts this day, and bless them with your love and power. Use them in the struggle for justice and the work for healing and peace, undertaken by your faithful people here and everywhere, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

God of all the ages past, hope of years to come, help us to remember you day by day. Keep us prepared to shine the light of your gospel into the dark corners of the world so that hope is renewed, and need is exposed in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray together, saying:

Now we join our voices with the followers of Jesus in every time and place in the words he taught us all:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

May God send you out to be beacons of peace in a dark world of conflict. May He make you instruments of peace for whoever you meet and wherever you go. And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.