

**Sermon Notes:** Nov 10, 2024 **Focus:** Jesus, the Temple, and generous woman  
[Lectionary readings](#)

I will focus on the widow who gives at the Temple in Mark 12. I have a hard time imagining that Jesus is lauding her as a role model for *our* giving. However, when she is the topic of a sermon, the only thing I have ever heard is: “give to the bone, if you really want to be faithful.” What if you imagined Jesus seeing her two coins dropped in the treasury as indictment instead? She gave all that she had and trusted the Temple to catch her free fall, but they repeatedly refused to lift a finger. Jesus does not say “Wow, we should all be like her!” Either she has an amazing faith, or she is being exploited by indifference and greed. *I think it is likely both.*

In Chapter 13, right after this scene, Jesus talks about the destruction of the Temple with no pause to moralize about giving. The role of the Temple and Jesus’ unfolding purpose seems to be the driving themes of Mark 11-16. Look at page 2 for the bibleproject.org graphic to frame Mark in context. Mark focuses on Jerusalem’s failing and Jesus becoming the true King and no time on “give till it hurts.” We can think about generosity less in terms of how good it will make us feel (it does), and more about how our generosity creates safeguards for those on the margins (it does, and that feels good too).

I like what Sung Soo Hong in Louisville, KY, on workingpreacher.org says about this story. *In 12:35–40, Jesus critiques the scribes harshly...In verses 38–40, Jesus critiques the scribes’ social and religious practices. The most relevant part is verse 40, in which Jesus says that the scribes “devour widows’ houses” (Greek oikia in the plural).*

The condition of the widow was so poor because she had no family to take care of her. Widows in the Ancient Near East would have precious few job prospects. They could be easy ‘marks’ for having their ‘houses devoured.’ There seems to be indifference in the Temple to safeguard people who can be easily ground into dust. Worse yet, there are leaders who run to feast on misfortune.

Sung Soo Hong also writes: *Let us step back and look at the larger context. Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (and into the temple) at the beginning of chapter 11 and his departure from the temple at the beginning of chapter 13 constitute a literary unit. From the cursing of the fig tree in 11:12–14 to Jesus’ declaration of the destruction of the temple in 13:2, a major theme of the section is the destruction of the temple. This theme is clearly related to the religious leaders, as the section is filled with their challenges to Jesus (11:27–33; 12:13–27) and Jesus’ criticisms of them (12:1–11, 35–40). If our passage on the widow concludes a series of events at the temple in chapters 11–12, and if Jesus’ declaration in 13:2 is the conclusion of the section, it makes sense to relate our passage to the overarching ideas of the section: the destruction of the temple and the failures of the religious leaders.*

Jesus indicts the Temple then, and today we can celebrate the widow's faithfulness. She believes in God, wants to support the work of the faithful, and is

generous, even if her leaders fail her repeatedly. If I could extrapolate: *don't give to the bone, but do give for the sake of others, ask for god to safeguard your heart against indifference, check your greed, pray for the renewal of a caring community.*

This passage reminds me of one of my favorite BCP prayers: *Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen.*

Maybe we can have it both ways. The widow is indeed faithful, and systems can be corrupt, but grace endures so that we can watch and work with Christ along the way.

I will also do some Temple geography in the sermon. Location helps us understand why Jesus is casually observing peoples' donations. Note: Jesus probably was sitting at Nicanor's Gate looking across the Women's Court. See below and with more to come in the sermon. **Todd**

