

## **MARK 12:-38-44**

As Jesus taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance saying long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.

He sat down oppose the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “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 out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.

## **IN THE MEANTIME**

### **Mark 12:38-46**

For many years in my adult life, I have frequently had this gnawing feeling that I am not doing enough to solve the world’s problems. It is not guilt for I have done nothing really wrong. It is more akin to frustration and a sense of futility. It is certainly our jobs as Christians to do our parts in helping to usher in the kingdom of God on earth. But how realistic is that? You and I both know that the kingdom of God on earth isn’t likely to happen—especially in our lifetimes, if ever. You would have to believe, as did the early Christians as well as many modern Christians, that Jesus will return with the holy angels who will transport the faithful to heaven and purge the world of evil doers. That would be a big pile of corpses! You would literally need to have a new heaven and a new earth because I’m not sure the earth is even salvageable. Divine intervention would be absolutely necessary.

You may believe God will eventually get around to the Rapture. But even if you hold

fast to that vision, it still raises the question of what we do we do In the meantime? For while it is true that the world's problems are way too overwhelming for any person, any nation or any coalition of nations to fix, does that exempt us from putting our own shoulders to the wheel? If I can't make a difference, why bother?

I'm doing my best with our climate change problem: I hang out my laundry to dry; I keep my thermostat down in the winter to save on gas; I recycle everything that is recyclable; I compost my organic scraps; I take short showers; I own a Prius; and we don't even turn on the AC until the house temperature exceeds 80. We use ceiling fans instead. Am I really doing anything to slow down the cataclysmic increase in global temperatures and the frightening rise in sea levels?

Of course, we can ask the same question when it comes to our missions. Food insecurity in this country—and it is getting worse with the cost of groceries skyrocketing—seems a problem way too big to wrap our arms around. So, does that mean our sandwich program and our food drives are mostly irrelevant? Hunger is systemic. Hungry people today will be hungry people tomorrow no matter how much we do today.

Our scripture for this morning makes a point that all of us do-gooders can take to heart. There are numbers of lessons we can glean from this passage. Aside from the obvious issues surrounding narcissism and pretentious concern for the suffering, Jesus is talking about the value of each person's contributions without regard to the actual amount. *Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those contributing to the treasury for they have contributed out of their abundance while she has contributed out of her poverty.*

Isn't there a parallel here with any feelings of futility we might have when it comes to our efforts to make the world better? Let me tell you a story: there was a man walking on the beach who sees a young boy throwing something into the ocean. He stops and asks him what he is doing. The boy answers, "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The surf is up, the tide is going out, and if I don't throw them back, they will die." The man replies, "Son, there are

hundreds of them. You can't make a difference." The boy bends down, picks up another one and throws it into the ocean. He turns to the man and says, "I made a difference for that one."

Doesn't that illustrate the way to think? Because when you consider problems from a global perspective, of course you will quickly become overwhelmed. Our focus has to be narrowed to a target we can actually hit. Because that is how we activate our compassion. Without compassion, we will sit on our hands. Compassion allows us to feel what another person is feeling, and to intellectually understand what they are going through which then motivates us to take some specific action to ease their suffering. Compassion is in there for all of us. In fact, it seems to be an evolutionary trait exhibited in all higher mammals. I read a fascinating article in my National Wildlife magazine which recounts an incident in Monterey Bay in 2016 when a marine biologist spotted a half-dozen killer whales hunting a sea lion. The whales were breaching the water, pouncing on their prey, then ramming it with their heads and slapping it with their flukes. It was a prolonged attack, possibly to teach a juvenile how to hunt.

And then, the biologist heard a loud trumpeting sound and watched as two humpback whales charged into the fray. They pushed away the predators and broke up the hunt. The sea lion escaped. The killer whales swam off.

What were the benefits, you might ask, for the humpback whales? That would be a matter of conjecture, of course, but Duke University anthropologist, Brian Hare, who has studied the roots of morality and kindness in other animals notes, "It ends up that friendliness, kindness, and helping others is a wonderful strategy for survival."

So, in the first place, we have to understand (to borrow a current catchphrase) that "We are all in this together." And beyond understanding that, we also have to act on it. You must have a consciousness that embraces the human community rather than just your bubble. I have been bemused in a way by our corporate response to the CDC's pleas to get a vaccination. "We're all in this together" has only been effective to a certain extent. But when prizes and beer and free concert tickets and perhaps even survival became part of the equation,

the vaccination levels have been rising quickly.

I get it that my efforts to help out with climate change are accomplishing next to nothing; but I cannot imagine *not* doing it. It is a minuscule contribution to the survival of the species. But what if we all did it? And you can say the same about any action you take that benefits the whole. It has been said that thinking the right thing is good. Saying the right thing is appropriate. But doing the right thing defines us.

I don't know if Jesus is coming back to save us from ourselves. That isn't the question. The question is, what do we do in the meantime? Remember the widow's two coins.

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