

**The Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 27
Holy Comforter Church
The Rev. John E. Shields
November 8, 2009**

**The widow's mite
The widow's might!
The widows might...**

Today's gospel is in two distinct parts: the scribes and the widow.

Regarding the first ---- Is it any wonder that Jesus gets into trouble with the religious authorities of his day?

Is it any wonder that the most powerful folks are angry with Jesus and want him out of their hair?

In today's gospel, Jesus is in the temple in Jerusalem. He is observing people and their behavior and he is observing how people make their offerings.

Jesus is most critical of the scribes. He does not mean all scribes, he means those whose behavior he describes.

He says, "Beware of the scribes ...who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces..."

Do you realize how nervous it makes me to read this standing before you with these robes on (who else has on long robes this morning? Maybe we can get the acolytes to take the fall for us this morning. ---- why are you smiling, choir your robes are pretty long!)

But Jesus isn't content to stop there, no, he also wants to criticize the fact that these guys (yes, wouldn't you know it, they are all guys --- can't blame it on the women.) --- Jesus also lambastes the scribes for always getting the best seats in the synagogues and always being at the head table at banquets.

The scribes ought to feel pretty well trashed by now, but Jesus is not through ---- in fact the worst is yet to come.

Now Jesus says that the scribes, "...devour widow's houses and for the sake of appearances say long prayers."

(Have you noticed that we've been trying to shorten the prayers lately?)

Seriously, this is actually, the most damning thing that Jesus says, "...(they) devour widow's houses ..." It implies --- no, it accuses these scribes of taking advantage of widows --- widows who as a group are classified among the most helpless, usually destitute people in the culture – often defenseless against those more powerful.

Jesus is teaching his disciples in these situations --- he teaching about good and bad examples of leadership. He is teaching "This is the way it is in the Kingdom of God."

Bad leaders act in conceited and self-serving ways.

Bad leaders flaunt their position over others – bad leaders dress and act in ostentatious ways. They use their clothing and costumes to make themselves appear more important than others.

Bad leaders take advantage of those less fortunate than themselves.

Well so much for bad leaders, what about good leaders?

Well, it is too simple to say --- though it is true --- that good leaders act in opposite ways --- they are humble, not conceited.

They serve others for the other's sake, not their own.

They do not use position to be over or better than others.

They do not take advantage of others.

Which just happens to bring me to the widow that Jesus observes and points out to his disciples.

This woman gives all that she has as her offering.

In a world in which widows were often victimized, this woman has taken initiative in her own life.

She refuses to be a victim.

Jesus uses her example of giving as an example of leadership to his followers.

As opposed to flaunting her gift --- she is humble and unassuming.

There is not indication of her seeking special favor or recognition --- even though hers' is the greater sacrifice.

Certainly Jesus is more concerned with intent than content.

Certainly Jesus is more concerned with motive than money.

Certainly Jesus is more concerned with action over words.

Well, what is it that our model of leadership has to teach us this morning?

What might our widow's mite show us about being a faithful follower of the Lord? Has the widow's mite become the widow's MIGHT?

I think that Jesus wants to see our actions consistent with our words.

I think that we are to learn that the value of the gift cannot be set by its inherent cash value --- but rather by what it represents for the giver.

If we say we love God how, do we show it in the love we have for our neighbor?

If we say that Jesus is Lord of our life, how does that play itself out in our day-to-day encounters with other people?

How does our love of God differentiate our behavior and our attitudes from those of the rest of the world?

Does wearing the label "Christian" really make a difference in how we live, or is it just a part of our social set?

What do our gifts to God cost us in terms of commitment?

When considering the very small gift that the widow gave and Jesus' reaction, it becomes apparent that gifts, which go unnoticed by most of us, are very much noticed by God!

Several years ago during a Saturday evening service, we were having a dialogue sermon on this gospel – we did dialogue sermons at this informal service – don't get any ideas!

We were discussing whether Jesus was saying he wants us to give all our money – several folks had ideas about that notion, but a woman named Mary really hit the nail on the head for all of us.

Mary said, “Jesus may not want all of our money, but he certainly expects to have all of our heart.”

Let us pray this morning that we like the widow can give our selves and our hearts to God, and that like her, we can trust that God will do more with us and our gifts than we could ever ask or imagine.

Maybe as we begin thinking about our Annual Giving Campaign, we should consider the notion that if we truly give our hearts to Jesus, the money will take care of itself.