

Sermon – Mark 12:38-44
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Grace Lutheran Church
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“What Mite We Do Now?”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” The widow of Zarephath is nothing if not a realist. As a widow with a child, she was already pushed to the margins of existence even before King Ahab ascended to the throne. And let’s just say that King Ahab’s reign didn’t do anyone any favors. He abandoned true faith in the true God in exchange for false religion. He became entangled in questionable foreign alliances. He generally led the people into severe morale decline, which is the pretty much the first thing on King Ahab’s Wikipedia page – and yes, Wikipedia is where I go for hard-hitting biblical interpretation. But even without Wikipedia, this woman, this widow, knows the result of the new king’s program. The rains have stopped, people are left to fend for themselves, and the end might as well come now. Those on the margins are the first to be forgotten. Time to scrape up the last bit of food, tell her son that she loves him, and then die together. The crumbs of despair are all she has left. But where despair sets in, our God begins.
2. More than 800 years later, we meet another widow. We find her, too, with all that she has in her hand. But instead of a last meal, she is at the temple, placing the clinking coins into the treasury. Her faith and generosity are

admirable, but to what end? Widows, along with orphans and foreigners, are afforded special status throughout the Old Testament, lest the people forget to help those most in need. Yet here we see this woman willingly handing over all that she has so that the rich can get richer. And not just the rich – the religious rich! These scribes have pulled off the greatest con of all. They've convinced the poor in their midst that it is their job to stay poor so that the rich can get richer. And they've slathered the lie with the language and rituals of faith. Is the woman to be admired, imitated, for giving her last mite? Yes. But only because she believes it is God she to whom she is giving. But where will she go from here, with an empty purse and no help? Perhaps to Zarephath, or wherever widows go when all is lost. But when all is lost, our God sets out to find.

3. To the woman, the widow of Zarephath, comes Elijah. He has nothing material to offer, nothing but God's promise. She has a handful of meal, a drop of oil. For God, this is more than enough to work with. Together, the woman, her son, and the prophet are saved. In the face of despair, they find not only a miracle. They find each other. They are not alone. They reach out to each other, and find it is enough. To keep going, it is enough. In the temple, Jesus attacks the self-righteous hypocrisy of the scribes, declaring that their long con is up. The temple, meant to be the connecting place between the human and the divine, is coming to its end. Christ – who is both priest and sacrifice – grants us entry into the true temple, one not made by human hands. In this temple, Christ's own body, nothing is demanded of us. It is all grace, all gift, all the way down, with widows and all those once marginalized now at the top.
4. How do you enter this holy space today? Broken? Afraid? Despairing? I know this is true for many of you. I know that many of you fear that our nation has taken a dangerous turn for the worse. And no, not everyone here feels that way. We are a divided people in a divided nation, and we hope in faith that

God will heal our divisions. But I know from conversations with many of you this week that many of you fear that life will now become more difficult, especially if you are a woman, or a person of color, or a member of the LGBTQ community, or an immigrant, or a refugee, or. . . I see you, friends. I hear you. I share your fears. I do not know what the coming years will bring. No one ever does with certainty. But for many of us, dark clouds seem to be gathering. We will see. And many of us are here with broken hearts, for death has been too close a companion in these days. Bob and Kent and Jim and then Julie and now Mike. Lord, have mercy. Elsa and Sadie, I am so sorry about your dad. I liked him so very much. And we love you so very much. How do we move forward from the emptiness of literal death? And then there are the cares and concerns known only to ourselves. These may be unknown to others, but they are no less weighty, oppressive, despair-inducing. Is there a word for us? For any of us? Something more than a bromide, more than mere pabulum?

5. Well, last things first. Jesus is still the Lord of a Kingdom not of this world. When the temple of his body was torn down, God refused to let death have the last word. Beyond every death now is life, and nothing in this world can undo this fact. But hope that is only for another world is only half the story. Because resurrection is bodily, it is about the fullness of life in the next world and in this one. It is about life, here and now. Resurrection is resistance, Resurrection is God's announcement that the ways of hate and oppression and violence and death will not go unchallenged. The good news is that, no matter whom you voted for, your calling from God is the same as it was last Monday. Set free and alive by Christ, we live to serve our neighbors. This is how we follow the example of the woman in the temple, by giving the fullness of our lives for the well-being of those around us, to the glory of the God who has given everything for us. We stand with the widows of the world. The children. The displaced. The refugees. With LGBTQ individuals and persons of color. We stand with them, come what may, because God stands with them.

Because God met them at the edge of despair in Zarephath and made a path back to hope. Because Jesus came to the temple and overturned its widow-devouring ways. Because God will not let them go and will not let us out of our calling to care for them. So, what to do? What “mite” we do? Let’s do the next right thing. And the next right thing after that. And after that again, come what may. Trust that when we come together in our need, God will provide daily bread. Know that in his dying, Jesus has shown us the way out of death. Believe that whatever the future holds, God will be with us. Christ has made a home for you forever. Let us go to the margins, to the people there that God loves, and there discover the power of the risen Christ at work in our world. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.