

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost
November 11, 2018

Text: Mark 12:38-44

Theme: "House Hunting"

House hunting, have you done any of that lately? It becomes a necessity when you are moving into a new community, or it may just be your choice to look for someplace new. It could be a place to rent or one to buy. Your hunting could be for your first house or you may be an old hand and a pro at this business.

What do you look for? Different folks look for different things. What one person finds desirable the next may find almost repulsive. You try to find what meets your needs adequately and your wants satisfactory. It won't be perfect, even if it is custom made for you later you find that it was not quite what you had in mind. You likely will have a number of houses to choose from. If you are on the TV show "House Hunters" that number will be three. I understand more are considered but the show is built around three.

So you find what you want within your budget and then happily ever after? You hope to have many years at that house. It becomes a home full of memories and many of them good.

Today we have a scene in God's House, in the Temple area in Jerusalem. Who do we find there and for what are they looking? They weren't seeking home ownership there, but there were certainly attitudes exhibited about ownership. Some of them were very full and at the same

time empty. There was at least one who was empty and yet was very full. And there in the middle was the One who emptied Himself that we may be full.

We take a look at the scene of our text. We actually start at the end and walk it back the other way. So we see this widow. Widows often didn't have much in the way of resources. This was not always true. If her husband had been a man of means and wealth then his widow would be far from destitute. Her needs and that of her children would be more than met. She would even be in the position to give to the needs of others. Her cup would be full.

But that's not the widow we see in our text. The one we see was likely much more typically of widows then. Often it would be the case that before she had become a widow she and her husband would just be squeaking by. That's the way that it was. It was a life of hard work meeting the basic needs and little opportunity to build up any reserve. Reserves were not normally in the future of those laboring in the fields, or casting their nets or swinging their hammers.

The widow comes to the Temple. We know she's poor as we are told so. She was there to worship and give of what she had. She came to cast her coins in the gazophylakion, the treasure box in the Temple courts. I've read that there were several chests that formed the entirety of this receptacle. The openings were trumpet shaped. The funds collected were used for support of the temple worship and for the poor. Giving was to honor God and serve your neighbor. The gazophylakion I have here is not

very ornate, but it will serve the purpose. The poor widow comes and throws in just two coins that we are told made up a penny together. Probably these two copper coin were the smallest in use, wouldn't buy much. Perhaps compared to current values it would have been a couple of dollars, wouldn't buy much, but a little.

She's not the only casting that day. The rich are coming, nondescript here, just called "rich." They could have been successful merchants, large land owners, money exchangers, chief priests, tax collectors—no probably not them, money probably not wanted. These folks had made money, inherited money, maybe both. They came with full cups and as they pass by there was the pleasant sound of temple ringing with the sound of those golden coins. They were feeding it in.

Were there scribes among the rich? There could have been. In Luke 16 we read that some of the Pharisees are described as lovers of money (16:13, 14). Many scribes were from this party. Scribes could have been in a position to feed the appetite of the gazophylakion.

Scribes, like the ones Jesus had just said to be on the look out for. Remember they loved their rules, rules that could even rule over God's Word. And they could make a show of their rule keeping. We read "for a pretense making long prayer." (vs 40) They loved being honored, coveted the best seats in the synagogue and somebody seats at the feasts (vs 39). Some had been devouring widows houses. How could that be? Were they in some way using their positions of influence or means to get their hands on what was not theirs? They could have been responsible for making the

widow poor, tithing mint, dill, and cumin, but neglecting justice, and mercy, and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23).

Then there were the scribes quizzing Jesus, the one in particular, the rule counter, maybe (613, remember), asking about the greatest commandment. This was the one Jesus said was not far from the kingdom, but not far was too far, not in. Was he among those casting coins on this day? Yes, the temple courts were singing with the sound of cast coins. They were large gifts and meager, and probably others in between.

Of course the Teacher was there on that day along with those being taught. It seems He had a good seat, a good observation point. He could see the casting action of who was giving what. How would we like it if Jesus could see what we were casting, oh, that's right, He does. Jesus could see more. He could see the hearts of the casters. His students were watching also, maybe watching the casters as well as the One watching the casting. Surely they had learned by this time that Jesus was teaching even when words were not coming out of His mouth. But now words do. He calls them to Himself and speaks. He speaks the truth as always.

He speaks the truth about giving. He says the little is more, the sum of two coins is greater than the sum of many, many coins, the sum of pennies greater than that of \$100 bills. This was not obvious. If you put the gifts on the balance the one side easily goes down and the other up. But Jesus is into fractions, the parts of the whole. Those who gave a big pile had a big left that they had not given. There was no thought of what they use to eat and drink the next day and the next day after that, maybe

many good things laid up for many years. Even if they had given half or 3/4 still an ample pile. But this widow is in the same boat as the one in Zarephath, down to just a little and then no more. And unlike the widow of Zarephath who was a little reluctant about giving to the needs of Elijah, she gives her all. It was a small amount but she put in the whole chunk at the Lord's house on that day.

Maybe you could say the widow had little to lose, just two coins. So you are hungry. You have two dollars, can't buy much, but you could buy a McChicken sandwich, but instead you give it away. Look what the widow is doing. She is doing the very thing Jesus has answered as being the two greatest. She is honoring God and serving her neighbor—loving God and loving her neighbor.

How is it with the house of our hearts? We can be like those long praying scribes, pious for show. We maybe do want our greatness to be acknowledged in some way by others. We are all for humble service, but a little award for humility would not be so bad.

We too may have our hearts set on things for security. Is there not always room in our treasure chests for more treasure? We too are probably not worried about what we will eat or drink or what we will wear, yet we do worry if there will be enough. There was before, but will there be this time? Planning is always in order, relying on the treasure chest contents for security and fullness of life, never.

Lives can be full yet empty depending upon with what they are filled. None of us are in demanding positions when it comes to righteous

treasures to gain God's favor. We are all poor, destitute, and blind. Our self-filled treasure chests of righteousness are always full of garbage.

Yet there is truly treasure, rich and plentiful treasure. It is found in the One who made Himself poor for our sakes. Jesus was in the position there at the temple to see and in the position to know what was in the heart. He knew if hearts were full of pride or emptied in repentance. Jesus was full, full of the Divine, fully divine, and yet He empties Himself. He did not empty Himself of His divinity, but of the trappings that went with it. The best seat was rightly His. His seat should have been there in the Holy of Holies, and even that could not have contained Him. But instead of that, He took that place of shame and sorrow, and pain at the cross. There He offered for all the sacrifice of sin (Hebrews 9:28). He took the fullness of our sin upon Himself that we may have the fullness of His righteousness. His offering has been accepted and He has been raised up in victory, a victory that we share in.

Through faith in Him we have gone from creatures that were just hell bent to those who are heirs of heaven with Him. We have gone from death to life, life forever and full life now serving Him.

The Giver gives to us and we give from what we have been given. He is fully able to supply as we see Him doing for the widow of Zarephath. God's little goes a long ways. It is enough. The grasp of our possessions on us had been broken as we grasp the promises of Jesus. So what does this look like in your life and mine? Does it mean making your check out for the offering for the full amount in your account? No, not necessarily,

but it does mean giving in trust from what God has entrusted to us
whether that is a little or a lot. We sang about 18 minutes ago,

Lord, help us all, with You, to yield
Whatever love demands
And freely give, as You have giv'n,
With open hearts and hands.

What does love demand of you today as you consider those in need in
intersection with your life? What has Christ entrusted to you that you may
joyfully respond to that need? I can't answer it for you, nor you for me.
Those love demands are met as we remember Christ's fullness of love.
Through that love we are members of God's household. House hunting?
It is God who has sought us to be part of His house for which we praise
Him.

For Jesus' sake. Amen