

Scripture and Message
10 November

Scripture: Mark 12:38-44 NRSV adapted

³⁸[Jesus taught saying], "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces ³⁹and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!

⁴⁰They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

⁴¹[Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

⁴³[Jesus] called [the] 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. ⁴⁴For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God.

Message: F.R.O.G.

This is a great story for the stewardship campaign. Give until it hurts, give until you can feel it. Give from the heart, not for recognition. Don't be that person who tries to hold the congregation hostage through the amount you contribute. Don't be like the scribes and pharisees who gave publicly in order to garner recognition! We need to give sacrificially – give until it hurts – like the widow...or at least we should contemplate giving more from our excess. How many of you have heard this sermon?

And it's true. This is a valid set of points to take from this story. The widow gave sacrificially – a small amount, but an astonishing percentage. According to Jesus it was 100% of what she had. And the scribes, wearing their long robes, gave because it was expected and an expected way to show ones stature in the congregation of the faithful. You literally got to make a lot of noise when giving your donations and alms to the temple.

Because the collection for the treasury in the temple was accomplished through big metal horn-like things – almost trumpet like or maybe more tuba like – big metal funnels that rang with noise as silver and gold coins were dumped into them. Kind of like when we shake our noisy can offerings (shake). Lots of noise to let everyone in the area know just how much you were giving! See how much noise I can make! My alms are noisier than your alms! My check has more zeros on it.

But in the middle of that cacophony, Jesus draws our attention to the smallest of sounds – two small copper coins being dropped in – (drop pennies) making almost no noise – not calling out for attention. But Jesus draws our attention to that slight sound (drop again) to mention how much was dropped in, not because it was a lot monetarily, or financially, but because it was a lot percentage wise. All the noisy offerings were being given out of the excess of the givers – the extra left over at the end of the month – a small percentage of their income. That slight noise from the two small coins was given from the heart – from what was needed – from what little was there to begin with. As Jesus said, "She gave all that she had." (v. 44) Nothing held back for a rainy day, nothing put aside for tomorrow...

I can't give like that. I can give. I can tithe. Sometimes maybe even more than tithe, but I cannot give everything I have away. I need to have savings – I need to have a rainy-day fund – I need to have the medical emergency fund – I do not have the faith of that widow. My faith does not manifest through giving everything I have financially to God. Because you see, the widow put herself and maybe her family firmly and fully into

God's hands. She trusted her everything to God. She showed the faith of a FROG – Fully relying on God – financially.

And that is what the story is about for me. This is what I hear from the Scriptures today and not a message about financial stewardship. I know the truth that preachers preach what they themselves need to hear. The widow is an example of fully relying on God – being a FROG. And somehow, this week's events are driving home the message to me that I need to remember what it means to rely upon God and not upon this world. Do I hear an Amen?

Sometimes it feels like nothing is right, that up is down, that Orwellian double-speak is in, that the inmates are running the facility. And I do not understand what this world is coming to. And I know I am not alone in this, and I know that some people with radically different political beliefs also feel this way. This world can feel unexplainable and uncertain and scary – no matter who you are or who you voted for.

What do we do? When we are scared and uncertain about what the future holds, what do we do. Some of us get angry and work ourselves up to fight back against the future. Some of us prematurely decide that the world is ending and give into despair and apathy. Some of us try to ward off the future with denial and optimism, "It won't be so bad," we say, or "we've lived through this before and we were ok, we will live through it again."

I find myself needing to remember the widow who put her entire life into God's hands. A faithful woman wrote about a time in her life when she had to put her entire life in God's hands; when even in the midst of the scary and the unknown, being a FROG fully relying on God got her through. She writes,

"As some friends and I were driving to a birthday celebration lunch, a lady pulled out in front of us. As airbags deployed, my car stopped between a fire hydrant, a tree, and an electrical pole. The fact that we could all walk away was a miracle in itself. In shock, and with lots of bruising, I went on to the emergency room to be checked out as a precaution. They were looking for internal bleeding, fractures, or anything unusual. The scans picked up everything. They discovered I had a kidney stone and **something else**. After tests and biopsies for several weeks, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. They said it was against the chest wall and would likely never have been discovered on a mammogram. A totaled car, unplanned scans, a miracle. Yes, it was breast cancer, but the fact it was discovered under such odd circumstances due to a car wreck ... miraculous. Especially since being caught so early it was easily treated."

A car wreck is not something expected or planned for, and if you are in one, walking away is usually the best outcome. But then to be diagnosed with cancer, a cancer that would not have been found without the wreck...sometimes God's plans are hard to understand. I have to tell you, in her place I would be asking God if maybe there might have been a different way to get the cancer diagnosis – But It was not in a place for the mammogram to find, and everyone walked away from the wreck – maybe God's plans are better than my plans...

Maybe, even when I can see so little light, when the clouds of despair are gathering, maybe even then, or especially then I can lean into being a FROG. Fully relying on God. Like the widow, trusting God in the good times **and in the bad and sad times of life**. Life has suffering, pain, sorrow, and disappointment. Often, we do not have control over our circumstances. But I know I will walk through the challenges of life with God or without God. I have made a conscious decision to choose to walk through whatever I face with God, even as I question the plan.

Fully Relying on God means trusting God in all circumstances. What if the circumstances and situations I face are for my good? What if the bad places in life are to allow me to better enjoy and appreciate the good times? God has not brought us this far to leave us orphaned. So, we learn to ask ourselves, "What can I learn

from God through this experience and this part of my faith journey? What is it that I need to learn? How can I lean more fully into relying on God?"

As with so much in life, the answers are more easily said than done. How do we more fully rely upon God, we learn to Trust God even when there are no answers. (And the odds are that the answers and understanding that I seek will not come this side of heaven.) In the book of Job, when God finally speaks (Job 38), God never answers Job's questions. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, God does not answer to me. God has a greater plan and purpose that I may never understand. God is God, *and I am not*. Trusting God, and relying on God, needs to be our response especially when we can't answer the *why* questions. "Why did this happen?" or "Why did this happen to me?"

When relying on God we can also **trust God with the impossible**. There is not one single person or anything that has the power to stop God's plan—not a car wreck, not cancer, not even an election. God is ultimately in charge, even when I can't see or understand it. God has it. God is really and truly in control, even when I am not. What we may perceive as a setback in life may actually be a setup for God to do something that we, that I cannot even begin to imagine.

And this is why I honor the widow with Jesus. She has evidently learned to faith lesson that I am still struggling to learn, that it doesn't matter how much or how little you have in life, if you become a FROG and Fully Rely On God. Do I hear a ribbit?