

*As Jesus taught, he said,
“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and to 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 say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”*

*Jesus sat down opposite 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 she out of her poverty has put in everything she had,
all she had to live on.”*

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If anyone asked Jesus what his message was,
He could respond, “My message is my life.”
The thoughts of his heart, the words mouth,
and the works of his hands are in perfect harmony.
Jesus also quickly spots any lack of realization and integration,
especially in other rabbis!
So his teaching includes unmasking the discordant messages and
behavior of the religious elite.
These men are informed about the love of neighbor,
but these teachings at the heart of Israel,
have not been taken into their hearts.
The result is hypocrisy, pretense, and duplicity.
They say one thing and do another.
Jesus is watching.

What Jesus sees basically, is that self-love has replaced love of God.
They love all of the superficial externals and perks: long robes,
salutations in the marketplace,
the best seats at synagogues and banquets.
What they gravitate toward is anything that makes them the center.
Even when they pray, it’s for the sake of appearance.
The ego, always unsure of itself, needs constant adulation.
The scribes are owned by their egos.

Also, self-love has replaced love of neighbor.
In today's Gospel the neighbor is a widow –
a widow whose meager resources are plundered by scheming scribes.
The widow is a symbol for the most vulnerable in Israel.
Scripture reveals repeatedly that God cares for her in a special way.
Psalm 68.5 proclaims “God is parent of orphans and protector of widows.”
God also makes justice toward the widow
a condition for residing with the people of Israel. Jeremiah 7.6
But the most vulnerable is also a prey for the most rapacious.

Throughout the Gospel Jesus has consistently championed human needs
over the hardened practices of the synagogue.

Now he targets the Temple treasury.

When Jesus sits opposite the treasury,
it symbolizes that he is opposed to the whole Temple atmosphere
around money.

It is a public affair with the rich parading their large sums.

But Jesus is not concerned with the rich.

They are never exploited.

They give to the Temple out of their surplus.

Piety will never carry them away.

Like the scribes, the rich take care of themselves.

But the widow divests herself of all her support.

Her generosity plays into the devouring greed of the Temple.

Those who are supposed to protect her leave her, literally, penniless.

What is most frightening is that she cooperates with her exploitation.

This is a condition that is often mentioned in literature on oppression.

The exploited are so thoroughly co-opted
that they do not see what is really happening.

They even unconsciously contribute to it.

This mistake is common.

The widow may not grasp all that is going on,
but Jesus has not missed it!

It takes thoughtful and highly integrated people to notice the gap between
what is preached and what is practiced –

which brings us back to Jesus,

the widow,

and the Temple treasury.

Many of us Lutheran Christians have been formed by the teaching that,
all we have comes from God,
and to give it back is an act of vibrant faith.

This story is about the total claim faith makes on believers.
The manifest objective of this way of thinking
is to support the House of God.

God's chronic concern has been for the poor and the vulnerable.
This revelation preceded the Temple
and was one of the driving forces of the Exodus from Egypt.
No Temple policy should generate the expectation
that the vulnerable should make themselves more vulnerable,
and no widow should be allowed to impoverish herself.
The temptation in wearing down injustice is to become more unjust
than what we are attempting to wear down.
Injustice is both an individual habit and an ingrained social structure.
It is difficult to wear down something that is so pervasive.
It may be exposed here and there,
but it is never unmasked everywhere at once.
Jesus, is a wholly integrated person and is in sync with the heart of God.
You see, my dear sisters & brothers,
in his dying,
Jesus is the widow who put in everything he had –
all he had to live on –
for her,
for you
and me!

The House of the Parent of orphans and protector of widows
does not devour the houses of widows, ever!