

Mark 1:38-44/Leviticus 19:9-10, 25:8-12

The Widow's Mite/Year of Jubilee

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Stewardship 3

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This week, we continue to work on the mandala that is part of the stewardship series, "Our Money Story," adding to the third ring. Imagery in this portion of the design is inspired by Mark 12:38-44 (the story of the widow's offering) and Leviticus 19:9-10, which describes the command to leave the edges of fields and vineyards at the harvest so that people who are poor can glean what is left. The wheat laid along the corners of the square represent the corners of the crops. The imagery that looks like seeds and wheat that line the square represent the bounty that is to be shared with everyone, creating a community where the ones who are hungry finally have enough and equity is restored. The Hebrew Bible calls this the Year of Jubilee. The circles could also represent the coins the widow offers to the treasury. In this ring, we are reminded that Jubilee practices avoid creating systems that impoverish and leave the ones who are vulnerable without the resources and support they need to thrive.

Friends, I invite you into a time of prayer. As we pray, hold the dried beans in your hands.

Holy One,

In scripture, we read of the Year of Jubilee, we read of leaving the edges of the crops for the ones who are poor and hungry to glean, we read of families returning home for rest and Sabbath, debts canceled and the harvest shared. Help us imagine what Jubilee could look like in our world. In this moment of silence, hear our thanks for all we have—for the resources that nourish us and the love that sustains us.

(Silence)

In scripture we read the story of the widow who gave what she had to the church. And we wonder, did she go home to an empty cupboard? Did she get into bed that night with an empty belly? Were her neighbors who had more than enough helping her? Did the religious leaders even see her sacrifice? Help us imagine what it would be like for everyone to experience what it is like to be free from the anxiety of scarcity and free to practice generosity.

In this moment of silence, hear our prayers for the ones who do not have enough, for the ones who are hungry—for food, for rest, for justice.

(Silence)

God, turn our prayers to actions, our dreams to reality.

Amen.

Jesus was in Jerusalem, at the temple. It was the week following his protest-like entry into the city. And he didn't like what he saw there. At one point, in the author of the Gospel of Mark's story, Jesus turned over the tables of the money changers in the temple, not because there was a problem with them and their role, but as a symbol of the need for disruption in the way things were. The religious leaders were taking advantage of their positions and power, instead of advocating and caring for the ones who were vulnerable. Jesus taught his disciples that taking advantage of people who are poor is not something God approves of, especially when people who are supposed to be representing God do it.

Here is this week's text, Mark 12:38-44:

³⁸ 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, ³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ 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. ⁴⁴ 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."

This story has been so badly misused in churches, especially in the midst of stewardship messages, that I hesitated to preach on it today. But this is a good time to clarify the intent of this story for all of us, especially for some who may be new to DCC and haven't heard me talk about it before. First, this is not a story of Jesus lifting the poor widow up as an example for us. This is not a story meant to compel a person to give the church their rent money or food money and to just live on faith for the rest of the month. Jesus was not preaching his version of the

prosperity gospel that says, “Give to the church and God will make sure you are rich later.”

The temple treasury was supposed to be used to fulfill the Torah commands to collect offerings for the ones continually on the outside of economic security, like widows for example. By giving to the treasury, wealthy people fulfilled their responsibilities, so people like the widow didn’t have to. In fact, widows were not even required to give to the temple. Widows, and others without families to care for them or the means to care for themselves, were to be cared for using the money collected by the temple, but the system wasn’t working.

This widow gave all she had and the system was still failing her, “...she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

How would it change us and the church if we understood this story not as Jesus saying, “Hey, be like this widow, isn’t she great?” but instead as Jesus using this story and the widow’s act of giving as a way to highlight the corruption of the economic system in power? What if Jesus told this story to show us a new—and yet ancient—way of sharing, distributing resources, and caring for people? This story was not meant to guilt the ones who literally have nothing into “giving sacrificially.” It was meant to compel those of us who have more than enough to use our wealth, our power, and our imaginations to bring about a system that works for everyone.

And if we are serious about that, then we have to work together. This, friends, is how our individual money stories connect to the church’s money story. My hope is that, as you have remembered the money stories from our pasts and released the parts of them that have kept us from a sense of freedom with regard to money, that you have started to imagine a money story for yourself that includes the freedom to practice generosity. And I hope you can imagine helping to shape the money story of Disciples Christian Church with your generosity.

When I introduced this sermon series, I mentioned that there is a lot more to DCC’s story than money. And that’s true. The story our leaders and staff hope you will imagine with us is really about community. It’s about creating space for people to belong, to heal, to use their gifts, and to join us in working for a world of equity, justice, and inclusion. I wanted you to hear a bit from some of DCC’s leaders, so here are Alex Rivera, DCC’s Director of Music Ministries, Callie Rivera,

our Coordinator of Family Ministries, and DCC's Board President, Dr. Jamie Bennett.

Leadership Video

Worshiping, learning, and serving together, creating beauty, a sense of belonging, and reaching beyond the walls of the church together, supporting each other, being a place where our community, and each one of us, feels at home. You are invited to be part of all of that, from bonfires to choir practices, opportunities to learn and moments of laughter, celebrating life and honoring death...all of it. You have a place here as we imagine a community where everyone shares in God's abundance and everyone knows there is plenty of love to go around. You know, in spite of the awfulness of 2020, we've done some pretty great things together this year. Many of you received an email or letter in the mail that outlined some of the things your generosity made possible in 2020.

In the midst of a pandemic, we have continued to honor our financial commitments to our community partners like CONCERN, Agape, Family Promise, and Martha's Task. We have continued to pay our staff and maintained our building and grounds. Right before COVID hit, we welcomed Alex and Callie to our staff and we have welcomed new members I can't wait for you to get to know better when we are together, face to face. Together, we have found new ways and spaces in which to gather and we have lived what we have known all along, "The church is not the building, it is the people."

Our leaders have shared what they imagine for the next 5 years. I am inspired by their thoughtfulness and their ability to acknowledge the world we are living in now and hold out hope for the future. As for me, I have been your minister for almost 4 years. As I look back, my heart is full as I think about the new members we have welcomed who have made our story richer, certainly never dull! In the next few years, I think our online presence is going to encourage us to find new ways of being DCC. How might we welcome members who want to be part of this community but don't live in Bartlesville? I am excited about Alex's vision of growing leadership in young musicians and I can't think of a better mentor for them than Alex and a better congregation to love them. And I know Callie's plans to provide opportunities to bring us all together in ways that honor all seasons of life will attract families who want to be part of a community where children are

seen and heard and valued. Times, they are a changin' and we will change, but somethings will stay the same. I am more convinced than ever that our story of welcome and inclusion, of working for justice, and connecting with each other and the community will remain because that is the core of who we are, that is what really matters.

And it has mattered since 1964 when Jerry and Marilou Bork, Richard and Dorothy Welch, Blaine and JoAn Fraser, along with so many others and their families began this story. If those charter members had been asked in 1964 to imagine DCC in 56 years, they probably would not have imagined us worshipping like this. They could not have imagined a lot about today. But I bet they all would have been certain that we would be true to our roots, serving the community, helping people find their voices, and saying, "WELCOME," as we open the door wide. And if they had talked at all about money, they would have imagined that the place of money at DCC would still be the same. You see, from the very beginning, DCC has known that the value of money is in what we do with it. Money matters because it helps us care for our neighbors, it helps us raise our voices for justice, it helps us connect with people in our community who desperately need a place to belong, and it helps say to hurting world, "God loves you, right now, today."

So, this is your minister doing what I never, ever, in a million years imagined I would be doing. I am looking into a camera and asking you to accept the invitation to be part of the DCC story in 2021. I'm asking you to grab on to the vision that has been cast by our leaders and commit to being present, virtually or in person and to commit to giving financially to the church. We've got a cool story to write and it's going to take all of us.

You can make a financial commitment to DCC's 2021 Money Story by filling out the estimate of giving form you were sent and mailing it back to us or dropping it off at the church. Or, you can click on the 2021 Estimate of Giving button on the homepage of our website. I hope you fill it out today. DCC's Story is about all of us and what kind of world we want for us and for our children. Let's REIMAGINE it together! And be sure to join us next week, when we will celebrate your generosity as we conclude our stewardship series. And we may have one other way too long in the coming surprise happening as well. Be sure and join us!

