

Wednesday in Trinity XIII  
LTS Chapel

24 August 2016  
Tshwane, South Africa

Hymn: 787 LSB  
Psalm: Ps. 34

**When Less is More: Mark 12:41-44**

**Bless, O Lord, the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts that we might hold fast Your truth, confess our sins, and trusting in Your mercy give over all that we have to Your service. Hear us for Jesus' sake.**

"You can learn a lot by looking." That's the wisdom of Yogi Berra. Not bad advice for seminarians either. Jesus did it. Mark tells us that the Lord positioned Himself by the treasury where there was a grand offertory procession going on as one after another of generous donors made their way up to the open coffer and made their deposits. "Many rich people put in large sums." That would cheer the hearts of the seminary board and Dr. Weber! Here are significant gifts by major donors! These are the ones who might get a wing of the temple complex named in their honor or even the rabbinic library and so perpetuate their memory long after their demise.

But the Lord's focus is not on the rich who contribute out of their abundance. It is not on the legacy-builders but on the nameless widow whose legacy is her poverty. Her presence would be a rather awkward at a high-end donors' dinner. Jesus' eyes rest on this woman identified only as a poor widow. Her contribution is hardly worth the effort it would take to add it to the data base. It's a gesture but it will hardly advance the cause of the temple. That's how the accountants would figure things. But Jesus is a "creative bookkeeper" so from the perspective of the Lord, the widow's gift outweighs the others. Monetarily, her gift might be small, but this is a case where **less is more**. That's the way things work in the economy of the kingdom.

Jesus says of the widow's gift that in contrast to the wealthy who gave out of their abundance, out of their reserve, she handed over everything she had to live on. Her livelihood is at stake. Where is her prudence? Is not this an unreasonable act of reckless irresponsibility? Mark doesn't dissect her motives or provide an analysis of what it was that prompted this woman to abandon her meager holdings into the treasury; the Evangelist starkly reports Jesus' words: "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." Her sacrifice was nothing less than a sacrifice of herself. With the wealthy, charity can be luxury item. It can be just one more thing that can be purchased to guarantee self-satisfaction and contentment. A bank account that is overflowing will not be traumatized by a generous donation to some worthy cause churchly or otherwise for there is always more to fall back on. With the widow, it was letting loose of the two coins on which her life depended. There is nothing here of proportionate giving. No conversation with a financial adviser on tax benefits of charitable giving. No pledge cards. This is no mere tithe of a tenth of her fixed income; it is all that she has.

Of the widow, Jesus says that she put in more than all the rest. Her **less** was **more** because it was offered not out of abundance but out of the little she had been given. And she gave it all. 'Tis the season for Stewardship Sunday when we enthusiastically sing "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold" but we cross our fingers; we don't actually mean it. We know better than to take God so

literally; and we fully expect He will not take us so literally either. But here is a widow with no one else to depend on – no father, husband, or brother. She cannot look to the religious professionals who had made a career of devouring widow's houses and knew nothing of a religion that is pure and undefiled visiting widows and the fatherless. She is nothing more than a Jerusalem bag lady, who throws what she has into the offering box and is done with it. Her puny, paltry- yes, laughable (for who lives on two copper coins adding up to only a penny) are gone. Empty-handed, she has nothing. No livelihood, only death. She has nothing.

You have nothing. Nothing, that is except Christ Jesus who though He was rich became poor, purchasing and winning you not with gold or silver but with His holy blood and His innocent death. To have Him is to have all that you need when earthly wealth dwindles and vanishes. His less is your more. With His death is your life. Purchased and paid in full. So toss the two bit life that you have over to Him as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to the One who has already in mercy bought you. A broken and contrite heart is a sacrifice that the Lord will not despise. There is nothing left for you to cling to in greed that you would use to guarantee your own security. Your life belongs to this Lord and it is already too late for you to hold on to it yourself. Amen.

Prof. John T. Pless