

**Sunday 02 May 2010 10.30 a.m.**

**Discipleship 2010: BUILDING, OUTREACH, BELONGING.**

**MAY: Building** : Giving to the building of God's household. RFS preacher.

**REFERENCES:**

**Luke 21 v 1-4 ( short version!)**

**Mark 12 v 28-34, 41-44**

We continue our 2010 theme of Building, Outreach, Belonging:

**Luke 21 v 1-4 (The Widow's Offering)**

*As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on".*

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This is a very familiar story for some of us – if you have been a member of a church fellowship for any length of time, it is one of those passages that we often use to show that **giving is part of being church**. And because of this, it is a passage that often produces a curious response in its hearers: you get to “ all she had to live on”.. and it's a bit like watching whales prepare to dive – the flap comes over that blowhole so quickly FLAP! and Whoosh! The whale is submerged under the water – and you don't see him - he's gone! “*Oh no! We are talking about money !*” - Well – Not Really.

( I remember when I first came to East London and heard that said – you know there's a way that East Enders say “Not Really” that is different from anywhere else in the world. NOT REALLY!! Ah. What's the matter, then? )

Let's take a closer look: *Mark 12: 28-34*

*<sup>28</sup>One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"*

*<sup>29</sup>"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>30</sup>Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>31</sup>The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>[c]</sup> There is no commandment greater than these."*

*<sup>32</sup>"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. <sup>33</sup>To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."*

This is the part of the ongoing debate between the teachers of the religious establishment and Jesus: you know – there's always one (and maybe several), who want the answer to this question:

- maybe they want to trap the teacher?
- maybe they want to show how clever they are?

- or to put you into a box (he's an Anglo catholic, she's a Pentecostal, he's a follower of X, or Y, he's a member of the monster raving loony party...) you know the type?

Maybe they want to "tick the box" – because they feel Good about being a Christian – or Bad – or maybe they are just plain worried that they aren't Doing It Right?

*Or maybe they just want to limit the damage?* "All your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" goes a long way towards – well, pretty much everything in life, doesn't it? Your self, your energy, your dreams, your secret self, your thoughts and your abilities, your possessions and your skills... – everything. That isn't a comfortable thought

What Jesus is saying here is this: it's not just about turning up when required to do so. Making the "right sacrifices". Playing an active and regular part in the life of the church. Doing what you DO. It's all about Love. Loving God, Loving each Other. Loving others whom we encounter. Being what you ARE – a disciple of Christ.

But we shy away. It's hard, it's risky! We are not comfortable to live this way! Where might it lead? Can I afford it? What if things get out of hand??? What if someone takes advantage of me?

Turn with me to *Mark 12* again:

<sup>35</sup>While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ<sup>[d]</sup> is the son of David? <sup>36</sup>David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

"The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand

until I put your enemies

under your feet." <sup>[e]</sup> <sup>37</sup>David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"

The large crowd listened to him with delight.

<sup>38</sup>As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, <sup>39</sup>and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. <sup>40</sup>They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

**The first idea that Mark links with giving is this:** the established church claims a certain authority. It is large. Parts of it are rather wealthy – even today (not this part!!). People engage in complicated debate: they develop theologies and argue out the finer points... - and I believe that yes! there is a certain place for that! Trust me - I am not knocking scholarship! But...

But. Sometimes people use Scholarship to avoid Fellowship. Sometimes it's more important to people to "look good" or to be "Right". To gain "respect" - or in certain cases even to make a living out of other people's devotion. And so, what is God's - becomes theirs. And the honour and affection that were given to God are directed towards human beings, and God is left out in the cold.

"Watch Out!" says Jesus. "Watch Out!" People who try to use the church in this way will be judged. Those who try to take advantage of God's people for their own ends will be punished severely.

Jesus isn't talking about establishment when he asks us to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. He isn't setting his disciples up to be exploited by a system. He is asking for a love and commitment to Him and to each other that are BIGGER even than the wrongdoing that

comes with the system (and there will always be some errors and some wrongdoing – because we are all human and we all make mistakes, and sometimes we are deliberately disobedient)

The Temple in Jesus' day was a very impressive place. The kind of people that makes you realise how very big the system is, and how very small you are. For starters, it was HUGE:  
(POWERPOINT)

We get a lot of information about it from the historians of the time - Tacitus, Josephus – in some ways it was every bit as impressive a piece of engineering for its time, as the Olympic Park is today, just up the road from us . People came from all over in thousands to the Temple Mount – It dominated the City. It was so well built and strongly constructed that it was used as the ultimate fortress when Jerusalem was under attack from the Romans. Solid vertical walls of stone – built from blocks as large as houses in some cases. A massive wall surrounding a rock – then the spaces in between the walls and rock had passages and vaults and tunnels in them - huge buttresses, and chambers where animals could be kept, and stores, packed around with loose stone and supported with great arches. On the top – pavements, shops, courtyards.

There were four courtyards in the Temple and you went through the first ( open to nearly everyone- as long as they were ritually clean ) to get to the second (only open to the Jewish people ), to get to the third( only open to Jewish men), to get to the fourth ( only open to priests who were “on duty” and wearing their uniform), Inside the fourth there was a place that was curtained off with a huge woven curtain from Babylon – all red and blue and purple and natural flax colours, where the priests’ representative could go just once year in a special ceremony. And you had to climb – flights and flights of stone steps, up - and up and up from court to court. At the top there was a citadel - a kind of strongroom - no windows – with passages leading to the rulers chambers – it is thought that Jesus was taken in there to be questioned during his trial.

There was a lot of power in the Temple. It was a place where you minded your ‘p’s and ‘q’s. In the court that separated the Jews from the rest there were notices carved in the stone “Be aware that if you cross this line into the next court, you will be responsible for your own death” – Yes – it was place to be careful

That was the nature of the human authority. But Jesus wasn’t talking about building up this temple – he claimed something greater. That was the point! He challenged the structures, he taught the people: He could take on the rulers, because he cared about people. No wonder they loved him. But – here was the challenge. Jesus didn’t just have followers – he made Disciples.

Jesus called his disciples his friends. He didn’t lord it over them. He didn’t talk down to them – but he asked them to follow him To do what he did. To live as he lived, loving God with everything he was, and loving each other:

*“ 15”If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever— 17the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be<sup>[c]</sup> in you. 18I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. (John 14: 15-19)*

Let’s turn back to *Mark 12*:

*<sup>41</sup>Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. <sup>42</sup>But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins,<sup>[g]</sup> worth only a fraction of a penny.*

*<sup>43</sup>Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others."<sup>44</sup>They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."*

Jesus was sitting - where? Not in the priests place, and not in the men's courtyard. He was in the outer courtyards somewhere – maybe in Solomon's portico – where all those pillars were, and where people used to walk up and down, out of the sun: a busy place, a crowded place – even a noisy place. And he saw something that really touched his heart. Being Jesus, he called his disciples over, so that they could see too: can't have seemed like much to see! One more woman in the crowd. Not particularly young. Not particularly well-dressed. Just a woman – one of many – who walked up to the metal giving plates and quietly put in her gift, and went away. No-one in particular. A woman of no importance.

The Temple – being grand – was understandably expensive to run, and everyone was encouraged – even required to give. So there were giving plates, which you threw your money into as you passed and it slid down inside somewhere to be counted. If you had plenty of money you could even throw in the coins and they would make a loud clatter on the metal plates ( "Look everyone! I've paid my dues! Look - see how generous I am ! See how successful I am ! See – God has blessed me – I am prosperous!)

Woman walks up, slips in a couple of lepta, slips away quietly... Easy to miss. Not so grand. Nothing to advertise.

Guess who touched the heart of God that day?

Jesus cared enough about that woman's gift to advertise what she did. He knew that probably she wouldn't be eating that day, because she had spent the coins on a gift for her God. A thank you gift. A gift that maybe wouldn't even be noticed.

**Jesus called his disciples over, and made it a lesson on living as a disciple.** We all have SOMETHING to give – however little it looks. Time, talent, laughter, teamwork, advice, know how, finances, friendship... We all have something to GIVE. Gifts touch hearts and build relationship: with God, with men and women.

This woman's gift has been remembered for nearly 2000 years. She was well enough remembered that she found its way into our Bible, as an example to follow. Ultimate respect.

**\*\* PRAY \*\***