TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

*ALL SAINTS SUNDAY*

Nu‘uanu Congregational Church

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*“Consumed” Mark 12:38-44*

**The story of the Widow’s Mite is one that most of us know right away. Most of us know it as a story of sacrificial giving. We hear or remember this story as Jesus’ way of praising the widow and condemning the Temple officials.**

***She* is the one who has humbly made her way to the treasury to put in her two small coins. On the other hand, the scribes and other Temple personnel are the ones who are parading around in their finery and throwing big banquets—a show of wealth and status. Such poor, humble, faithful people like the widow were never invited to such gatherings.**

**Most of us cheer the widow for her generosity and dedication to God and the church of her day—and this is a good thing. However, there is a little more to this story that I would like us to think about.**

**First of all, this story continues the action begun in last week’s Gospel passage. Last week, Jesus was in the Temple, and he had been verbally sparring with a group Herodians, and scribes. Finally, though, one scribe—seemingly, a very *unusual* scribe—asks Jesus a question about the Greatest Commandment. And very quickly, an amazing thing happens: Jesus and *that* scribe find themselves in agreement—the greatest commandment is to love God, and love of neighbor. On the strength of their agreement, Jesus declares that the unnamed scribe is “not far from the kingdom of God.”**

**Soon after, they part, but the lesson remains: Love God. Love your neighbor—this is the foundation of all the laws and the teaching. This is what is supposed to be the foundation of our life.**

**To make these declarations is to hold in contrast so much of what Jesus was seeing around him. He saw how everyone had a hard life, but he also saw how it was made harder by all the corruption and self-interest there was in the lives of the people, especially the leaders—all of the big, but also the little ways in which loving God was not embodied by those who were supposed to care for the people spiritually, morally, and in the way they conducted even the business of Temple life.**

**Jesus stands in opposition of all that does not assert or exemplify such a love. Thus, in the passage we heard this morning, this is made clear by the very location of the story. We are no longer in the Temple. We are near the Treasury where people came to pay their Temple taxes or tithes.**

**Jesus is with his disciples and has just walked through the marketplace before taking-up a position across from the Treasury.**

**From this vantage point, he is able to see the great diversity of people who are coming to pay their tithes. He sees the difference in their status and their demeanor. In this instance he sees and comments on the contrast created by the humble widow and the scribes. He sees her faithfulness and their falseness.**

Jesus sees the scribes’ show of wealth to be no less than a condemnation of them. He warns his listeners to be on guard against the scribes who pursue prestige, respect, and honor, and to be against such people who would devour widows’ houses. They do this with the demand for tithes beyond what the widow could sustain, and mismanagement of the widow’s assets –this is what the scribes had been entrusted with. (Given the concern for widows expressed in Deuteronomy and elsewhere in the Law this caution would not be a surprise to Jesus’ listeners.)

While Jesus especially mentions widows, we should read his comment as covering a much broader group of people. Widows, yes, but also orphans, the poor, the sick—all of these are included as Jesus speaks to the disciples.

As he speaks to us through this story, we are called upon to think about our own context. We are meant to ask ourselves: what are all of the ways in which Jesus is calling us to look at the inequities that surround us? We are asked to take note of those who are, right now, and among us, being “devoured” by the conditions under which we live.

Who are the “widows” among us today? Who are the ones who are being left out of the prosperity in our society?

On this particular Sunday, it is fitting—and even pleasant and an inspiration—for us to hear this story, and to see the pictures, *and* the faces of so many people we recognize today as “Saints of the Church.”

These are the people who heard Jesus’ call to gather-up those in the community who needed the most, and to minister to them. These Nu’uanu saints are the ones who put in the time and their treasure to build a church that would minister to those who might not have been included in the mainstream church of the day.

Later, as our church grew in numbers and in wealth, these people reached out to the greater community. They found their mission among those in need of medical care and so Kuakini Hospital became an important mission. For those in need of strengthening their body and spirit, the Nu’uanu YMCA became another mission. Young people who came here to Oahu for their education and in need of safe, secure housing were ministered through the dormitory.

Each of these examples looked beyond our church doors and family, and ministered to those whose resources—their money, their health, their well-being—might otherwise have been “devoured” by their needs.

Today, we carry on their ministry when we house families here on our church campus through *Family Promise.* This is not something we have been able to do these past 2 years but it is something that has been very important in the lives of this church.

Despite all the crush of noise of modern culture, we carry on their ministry when we extend invitations to young people who are interested in learning how the church serves in modern community, like the Internship program.

We continue the ministry of the saints of this church through monetary grants that support missions that are already doing something in the community—like *River of Life,* the Hawaii Foodbank.

We also continue their ministry when reach out to people in very personal ways. While I was in the rehab hospital, I received a lap quilt, and knowing how cold hospitals can be, I also took along the shawl Sheila made for me. So I had Sheila and the Sew Fun ladies with me there in the Rehab Hospital. Both provided a beautiful and needed splash of color to my room. I proudly showed-off both to all the staff that came near me because, even more than the color and coziness of each those gestures, each was like a warm hug from our whole church reminding me that I was not alone on my path back to mobility and strength.

All of these things—these missions and ministries—are the cruciform mark of discipleship which Christ emulated for us, and of which the Gospel of Mark reminds us through the story of the Widow’s Mite.

For Mark, discipleship involves no less that giving all of one’s life. However, in order to even contemplate what this means to us, we are also called to notice what is presently “devouring” the lives of people now, and in our context. What devours us, what consumes us, today? Much of it will be familiar—it will be honor, power, beauty, or money—these are old traps that many fall into. They are old temptations that are often obtained only at the expense of the lives and well-being of others—this is always a danger.

The old temptations are now also made more hazardous by the newer delivery systems we live with—advertising, social media, talk radio, and a 24/7 news cycle. All of these things are designed to keep us “tuned-in” so that they may consume our time and our perspectives—that is, our hearts, minds, and spirits.

How are we supposed to guard against these things and continue to care for others the way in which we are called to do?

In the passage from Mark we heard this morning, Jesus gives us a good example. As I said earlier, he came to take-up a place across from the treasury. He did this by walking through the marketplace.

What I hope we see from this is that Jesus continuously sought-out people. He went to see how they lived and what they needed. He found out where they were, and he went there. He found out what they had, but also what had been denied them—the big and little injustices and lack of compassion they lived with.

He did not look away when he saw suffering. He did not look the other way. He saw people and he asked his disciples to see them to. Indeed, if we are to be consumed by anything, it is to be by the desire to see and to serve those in need, the way Christ did and in Christ’s name.

On this particular morning, we are given this story to hear and to take deeply into our hearts and lives, even as we are surrounded by this “great cloud of witnesses,” our Nu’uanu ancestors and our saints of the church who did all this, and invite us to emulate their dedication and energy for God’s love. They are our good news because they let the light and love of Christ shine through them.

My prayer for us is that we will always remember them and their life with Christ, that *our* life with Christ may be as fruitful and as blessed to ourselves, and also and especially to others.

May this be so. Amen.