

Welcome, wherever you are, to this service. Our call to worship together this morning is Psalm 100:  
*Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.*  
*Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*  
*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.*  
*For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations*

**Come Holy Ghost our hearts inspire (StF 155)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fehCum04JQ>

<p>1 Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire, let us thine influence prove ; source of the old prophetic fire, fountain of life and love.</p> <p>2 Come, Holy Ghost (for moved by thee the prophets wrote and spoke), unlock the truth, thyself the key, unseal the sacred book.</p>	<p>3 Expand thy wings, celestial Dove, brood o'er our nature's night ; on our disordered spirits move, and let there now be light.</p> <p>4 God through himself we then shall know, if thou within us shine ; and sound, with all thy saints below, the depths of love divine.</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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Prayer of adoration and thankfulness

Almighty God, we rejoice that you are a great-hearted God, generous in love, generous in giving, generous without measure, and generous towards each one of us, whether it is in the extravagant beauty of creation; whether it is the offering of Jesus – His life, His love, What He said, what He did, who He spent his time with and the life that was given up on the cross.

Great God you are generous in the gift of the Holy Spirit. We praise you that your love knows no bounds, and reaches out to each of us, this day and every day. We respond to your love and seek to love and worship you through our words, our actions and service. In Jesus name we pray AMEN

Theme: In our first hymn we sang “unseal the sacred book”. I know people who seem to know what the bible says without any doubts. That’s not me. Looking back on my Christian journey I can see that there were times when I might have interpreted the bible wrongly. Today I want us to look at how we understand the bible and whether we get it right. To go deeper to see more than we did before , realising that we and others hold differing views at differing times in our spiritual journeys. To do this we shall investigate just one short incident from Jesus life as recorded in Mark’s gospel.

Sermon Part 1 / All Age Address (From Lucy Moore *The gospels unplugged*)

Prayer of Confession

Generous God, forgive us when we are short-sighted and blind to the needs of others;

Forgive us when we are hard-hearted and calculate what we can give or what is convenient for us to share.

Forgive us when we are mean-spirited and interpret your calling in ways that suit our own interests and preferences rather than invite love;

Forgive us when we selfishly follow the values of the world, rather than principles of your kingdom.

Heavenly Father, forgive us.

Out of love, Christ lived for us. Out of love, Christ died for us. Out of love, Christ forgives us. Out of love, Christ says, "Follow me". Thanks be to God, AMEN

**STF 455 All my hope on God is founded**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3LCGh02Vew>

<p>1 All my hope on God is founded ; he doth still my trust renew. Me through change and chance he guideth, only good and only true. God unknown, he alone calls my heart to be his own.</p> <p>2 Human pride and earthly glory, sword and crown betray our trust ; what with care and toil we fashion, tower and temple, fall to dust. But God's power, hour by hour, is my temple and my tower.</p> <p>3 God's great goodness aye endureth, deep his wisdom passing thought ; splendour, light, and life attend him, beauty springeth out of naught. Evermore from his store new-born worlds rise and adore.</p>	<p>4 Daily doth the almighty giver bounteous gifts on us bestow ; his desire our soul delighteth, pleasure leads us where we go. Love doth stand at his hand ; joy doth wait on his command.</p> <p>5 Still from earth to God eternal sacrifice of praise be done, high above all praises praising for the gift of Christ his Son. Christ doth call one and all ye who follow shall not fall.</p> <p>Robert Bridges (1844–1930) <i>(alt.)</i> <i>based on Joachim Neander (1650–1680)</i></p>
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READING: MARK Chapter 12 verse 38 to chapter 13 verse 2

SERMON <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DqXJpdD2UAFgehRnSDVmmGOYefiCURUS/view?usp=sharing>

The title of this sermon is: did Jesus smile at the widow's mite? When Jesus saw the widow put in her last coins, was he really smiling? For centuries, Christians have assumed that Jesus wants us to emulate a poor widow's sacrificial giving. As the story goes in Mark 12, Jesus was watching people put money into the Temple treasury. He was watching what was going on, as Jesus tended to do, didn't he? And then he said to the disciples to give them a lesson really.

*"this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury; for they gave out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, gave all she owned, all she had to live on." - Mark 12:43-44*

Now, you will know, same as me, that there are many passages in the Bible which, in context, teach that Christians should give, and give sacrificially, to meet the financial needs of the poor.

*Romans:...share you resources with the poor*

*Jesus for your sakes became poor*

*ACTS ..they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need*

*The Kingdom of Heaven...for I was hungry and you gave me food*

*"God loves a cheerful giver" 2 Corinthians 9:7*

*To love your neighbour as yourself is much more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12 v 33)*

Those bible passages are examples that the gospel is about giving to those in need and in giving sacrificially. Jesus' comments to the disciples makes it clear that the widow felt the impact of her contribution much more than all the rich people giving money they didn't need. She gave the only money she had, leaving herself no money to buy food to survive. Her sacrifice had painful consequences in her poverty.

And so the church - and me - has frequently assumed that Jesus is commending the widow's example to us...give everything you have ! Is the point of Jesus' observation to praise the sacrificial heart and actions of the widow? **Was Jesus Smiling ?**

Let's examine the context. Each story included in each Gospel is contributing to a larger story about Jesus' identity and mission. So we need to interpret each story by how it connects to the material before and after it. Looking at the situation of the widow's offering this is what Jesus says immediately before the widow's story:

*"Beware of the scribes who like walking around in long robes and respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets, **who devour widows' houses**, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation."*

Do you see the verbal connection in his reference to widows?

I think that if this widow's mite were only a lesson on giving, Jesus could have just as easily chosen a "poor woman or poor man" as His example - but He was very specific in His choice of "a poor widow.." and that links back to what he had previously said about the scribes.

And then another verbal connection occurs in the following passage when Jesus predicts the Temple's destruction: *As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down."*

The widow has given the last of her money to the temple.... And here is Jesus telling the disciples that it was a waste because the temple will soon be torn down. It begs the question again, was Jesus smiling at the widow's generosity. It's possible to think that the opposite is true, that Jesus is despairing and angry at other Jewish teachers who are persuading widows to give their money to the Temple bank account. He sees a corrupt religious system that no longer honours God's heart to care for the needy. Jesus sees that the temple system has created wealthy religious celebrities who construct lavish buildings and pray in long robes to puff up their public reputation, while the poor go bankrupt. That's why perhaps he isn't impressed by the "wonderful stones" and "wonderful buildings" in the Temple complex.

It certainly looks to me that Jesus is intentionally highlighting the widow's gift to the Temple as an illustration of how messed up Jerusalem is.....that the widow's offering is an illustration of injustice not generosity. He is condemning Jerusalem's leaders just like the prophets Amos and Isaiah and Ezekiel did before him. The widow's gift of her mite is evidence of what Ezekiel saw in the Temple over 600 years earlier when he prophesied: "The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice" (Ezekiel 22:29).

In that context of prophetic judgment against Jerusalem, the widow's offering takes on a much different meaning than we first suspect. The widow is a victim of oppression not an example to follow. We typically assume Jesus said or implied, "Go and do likewise. Give away everything you have." But he didn't. What did he say? He emphasized that the widow "out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on." The repetitive "all she owned, all she had to live on" draws the observant reader to Jesus' message. This widow no longer had anything left to live on because Temple teachers had convinced her to donate it to their extravagant slush fund.

Jesus was on a mission to end this corrupt system. You remember him turning over the tables in the temple later in his ministry. Jesus himself promised to do for people what religious leaders said only the Temple priests could provide. Jesus himself offered forgiveness of sins without people having to pay inflated prices to underhanded Temple businesses and exorbitant prices for animals for temple sacrifices. He predicted the demise of the Temple buildings and the reconstruction of a new Temple in his body to stop this kind of religious abuse. And the new temple would be his body; he said, in John's gospel: "Destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up

**Is it stretching the story of the widows mite too far to be read as an anticipation of Jesus own sacrifice, giving all he had?**

But there are other things that the story of the widow's mite teaches us. God sees what men and women often overlook. The big gifts in the temple were surely noticed by people; that's probably what the disciples were watching. But Jesus saw what few other people did: He saw the humble gift of a poor widow. This was the gift that Jesus thought worthy of comment; this was the gift that the disciples needed to be aware of. The other gifts in the treasury that day may have made a lot of noise as they jingled into the receptacles, but ... to be a bit flowery here ....the widow's mite was heard in heaven.

And yet....I would still wonder about the widow before we close this sermon. Did she have a heart to give; how did she feel as she was giving away the last of her money. Was she obeying the teaching; putting money in grudgingly and quietly so it wouldn't be noticed by most people how little she had put in? Or did she give with a generous heart.

We don't know, because there is no indication given of the widow's demeanour or frame of mind. Sadly the widow's gift was not only misguided, but for nothing, following on from the destruction of the temple in AD70. I like to think that her love for God rather than for temple obedience was something that was there, within her.

So finally this sermon asks 2 questions of us ..... you and me. Not the question "Was Jesus smiling"! 2 more

Are we willing to delve deeper into the holy scriptures and be open to further understanding of what the scriptures are saying to us.... As we have done this morning?

Other questions. If we accept my, and others, translation of the meaning of this passage – that Jesus was not smiling as the widow gave all she had: if we accept that, who are and where are the poor and needy today, the overlooked, the exploited.... And when we decide who and where they are, what can we do about it?

## INTERCESSIONS

Lord you call us to work for your kingdom to reach out to others in your name and bring your healing word, your gentle touch, your embracing love to them. Help us by your Spirit to be good workers, empower us as individuals and as a church to be ambassadors who know and do your will.

Lord hear our prayer for others. For those who do not have what they need in order to survive, who lack food and shelter, medical care..... We pray for those who live in fear for their lives with fighting and killing being an ever present danger.... We pray for those in danger of their lives or freedom through following Jesus Christ. Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

We pray for those who have more than enough to meet their needs, but who continue to feel empty inside, who struggle to find meaning and purpose in life, who turn to alcohol drugs or other destructive behaviours to try and hide the pain. Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

And we pray at this time for COP 26 that is concerned with the planet. Grant wisdom to those with a voice and action to those with knowledge.

We continue in our prayers, offering the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples "Our Father, who art in heaven....."

**StF 679 Come, build the church**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeDEZNKibcU>

<p>1 Come, build the Church — not heaps of stone in safe, immobile, measured walls, but friends of Jesus, Spirit-blown, and fit to travel where he calls.</p> <p>2 Come, occupy with glad dissent where death and evil fence the ground, and pitch a Resurrection-Tent where peace is lived, and love is found.</p>	<p>3 Exposed upon the open ground to screams of war in East and West, our ears will catch a deeper sound : the weeping of the world's oppressed.</p> <p>4 In wearied face, or frightened child, in all they know, and need to say, the living Christ shall stand revealed. Come, let us follow and obey !</p> <p>Brian Wren (<i>b.</i> 1936)</p>
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May the Lord, Mighty God, bless and keep you forever, Give you peace, perfect peace, strength for every endeavour. Lift your eyes and see his face, feel his grace surround you. May the Lord, Mighty God bless and keep you forever.

This time of worship has finished... let the Service begin.