

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle  
24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
11 November 2012  
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita  
Mark 12:38-44

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

We live in an image-rich world.  
TVs, magazines, iPods, iPads, iPhones—all visual, each presents an image before our eyes.  
And then there's all the people.  
The good looking and the not so attractive.  
The well dressed, those in uniforms, and those still in their pjs.

Everyone we meet, and even those we don't meet, is another image in our eyes.  
And as your mother taught you long ago, don't judge a book by the cover.

But who are we kidding?  
We all do.

We're all like the Scribes in the first part of today's Gospel reading.  
We all like to walk around in "long robes"—  
or maybe better for today, we like to dress to impress.  
Some would say, dress for the job you want.

We put on appearances.  
We know that others judge us for our cover, and so we give them a cover we want them to read.

We may not care so much about wearing the best product lines,  
but we do care that we seem put together, in control, above water.  
We've learned real well how to cover up the chaos of our lives.  
We've masked our stress so well that we're conscious about looking calm.  
We've whispered threats into our children's ears so that no one knows our anger.

Just as make-up covers the imperfections of the face,  
so does a smile cover the pain of our soul.

We judge books by their cover every day.  
And we know that's also how we're judged in this life.  
And so we live and we die by appearances.

"Beware of the scribes...they will receive the greater condemnation." (Mk 12:38, 40)

That's one image we see in ourselves and we see it all over the world.  
That's an image from which our Lord calls us to repent,  
to confess that ugly reality in our own lives,  
and to admit our judging of others based on how they look, or hold themselves, or their  
ability to keep it all together.

Repent, for this self-centered pride of the scribes lives within you.

And then, as Jesus “sat down opposite the treasury  
and watched the people putting money into the offering box,”  
Jesus saw *another* image.

Unlike the wealth and pride and made-up appearance of the scribes, Jesus saw a poor widow.  
Her poverty was evident just by how she *looked*.  
Probably wearing rags, or faded garments, she wasn’t dressed in any pretense—  
that’s what she had, and who she was.

As Jesus watched the pilgrims dropping their offerings into the Temple treasury, this poor woman caught His attention.

Her image and appearance stood out.

He heard the clinging of two small copper coins rattling the sides of the offering box.

She was a widow, that was apparent just by looking at her:

no husband to provide for her;

likely no children to care for her.

She had nothing.

Well, almost nothing.

She had two small copper coins, together making about a penny.

And even that she put in.

This is what we call the widow’s *mite*.

Now, the LWML has got a lot of leverage out of their mite boxes.

Many offerings of children and adults have gone toward some great missionary work.

But as far as I know, no one has ever put into the mite box as much as this widow did.

And for that matter, no one has filled out their offering card with as much as her either.

No one has put in *all she had, all she had to live on*.

This widow is no example for a stewardship campaign.

If she was, we’d all be crushed.

We get no comfort from this widow as an example, because none of us gives as she did.

None of us gives out of our poverty, no one gives everything.

We give a few bucks here, a few bucks there, a generous donation here, and another there.

But we’ve always got something.

There’s always enough left for us to keep up our appearances.

But not for this widow.

She has nothing and what little she has she gives.

She empties herself.

She puts her self into the offering, she *is* the offering.

And this is a picture, an image that Jesus calls His disciples to come and see.

She is different from all the other images around.

What makes this widow so unique?  
 What causes her stand out?  
 It's not her example, it's what she represents.

This widow is an icon of Jesus.  
 When the disciples gaze upon this worm of a woman—  
     when they see no majesty or appearances that might attract them to her—  
     they see Jesus.

Jesus gave everything, everything He had to live on.  
 He gave His life.  
 He Himself was the offering, the sacrifice, the two small copper coins.  
 He emptied Himself of all that He had, divinity and humanity alike.  
 He let it all out, hung it all on the cross, let it all die.  
 That was His offering.

And like the widow, if Jesus is just an example for us, then we'll be crushed.  
 Our giving will be shown empty and worthless.  
 Our sacrifices will wreak of self-centered pride and egotism.  
 Our lives will be revealed as empty and self-serving as the scribes.  
 That's what happens when Jesus is the example.

But if Jesus is a real offering.  
 If His life and death and life again actually *do* something.  
 Then there's hope, even for the scribe within us.

If Jesus' self-giving, self-sacrificial offering accomplishes what He says it accomplishes,  
     then not only are we free from the scribes, free from our self-serving sin,  
     but we are also included in Him—  
     in His offering.

When Jesus suffered the cross, He did it for us.  
 He died for the scribes and Pharisees in all of us.

And when He rose from the dead, He called us to rise as well.  
 Not as an example, not as something we can go out and do, but as something He does for us.  
 He calls us out of our graves, out of our self-made appearances, out of our lies.  
 He calls us to live with Him in His kingdom, where He reigns *for us!*

This widow is an image of Jesus.  
 And Jesus is the real offering of God Himself for the sins of the world, and that means yours.  
 His offering isn't something you can go out and try to repeat for yourself, or earn, or pay back.  
 It's something for which we say, "thank you," or better yet, "Amen."

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