

Jesus declares judgment on the temple system (Mark 12: 35-13:2)

The Question about David's Son

35 While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, 'How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? ³⁶David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared,

"The Lord said to my Lord,

'Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet.' "

³⁷David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?' And the large crowd was listening to him with delight.

Jesus Denounces the Scribes

38 As he taught, he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, ³⁹and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! ⁴⁰They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

The Widow's Offering

41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'

The Destruction of the Temple Foretold

13As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' ²Then Jesus asked him, 'Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.'

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Commentary

Mark now brings us to the climax of the Jerusalem conflict narrative – the showdown between Jesus and the Jerusalem authorities. It began in chapter 11 with the symbolic procession into Jerusalem. Jesus' strategy has been to bring into the open

the conflict that has been simmering throughout his ministry by confronting his opponents directly at the very centre of their power. His chosen location has been the temple. Mark has presented Jesus' "cleansing" of the temple as an exorcism that has provoked a series of battles over the question of his authority. Now Jesus will go on to make a final, decisive break with the temple, declaring it illegitimate. It is, in Jesus' view, irreformable, opposed to God and is destined for destruction by the Roman legions.

Jesus and Davidic messiahship (12: 35-37)

Jesus goes on the counter-offensive against the scribes. Having been subjected to a series of questions and tests, Jesus now becomes the one posing the questions. At first reading, his question about the relationship between the messiah and David appears to be a rather arcane question of exegesis – a "How many angels can fit on the head of a pin?" sort of challenge.

In fact, this is the moment when Jesus makes absolutely explicit the difference between his messiahship and the Davidic messiahship of popular expectation – a restored Davidic kingdom. We should recall that the Galilee of Jesus' own time was a hotbed of revolt and fevered expectation: God, it was alleged, was about to send a Davidic leader who would lead a successful uprising against Rome and establish Israel as an independent kingdom with a Davidic king. This is the messianic role that the crowds have tried to foist on Jesus as he approaches the Holy City:

"Blessed be the one coming in the name of the Lord;

Blessed be the coming Kingdom of our ancestor, David!" (11: 9-10)

This precisely the role that Jesus has resisted so consistently throughout his ministry. At each point that he has been declared to be the messiah, Jesus has commanded the person to be quiet (the so-called "messianic secret" motif). On three occasions, Jesus has said absolutely explicitly that the coming conflict in Jerusalem will not end well (the Passion predictions).

In Jesus' view, the scribal teaching on the Davidic Messiah was leading the people to be dangerously mistaken. God's Kingdom would indeed come – but not through armed revolt, leading to the restoration of the temple state. They would be realized when God finally transforms the whole world into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1 (a key messianic psalm) to make the point that the messiah is not David's son. Messianic authority, he insists, predates David. His point is not about genealogy, but about ideology: to be "David's son" is to stand in solidarity with the Davidic messianic vision of a restored temple state. It is an imperial vision that Jesus does not share. He – Jesus – is the "Lord" – the true Messiah. Shockingly, the messianic goal of the Kingdom of God will come about through the sufferings that he is about to undergo at the hands of the guardians of the imperial Davidic vision!

Jesus denounces the scribes (12: 38-40)

Scribal interests are thoroughly vested in the imperial vision. If the goal is the restoration of the temple state, then the scribal position, authority and influence is ordained by no one less than God. They are God's gatekeepers and spokespersons, and ought to be feted as such.

We have just seen, however, that Jesus' litmus test for true piety and theology is how power, wealth and privilege is put at the service of the neediest. Jesus declares that the scribes fail this test comprehensively: they court special privilege and status. They love the trappings and adulation of power and influence. Their apparent piety only serves to enhance their status. And, far from being the God-given means by which the prayers of the poorest for daily bread are answered, they ensure that they get the lions' share of any food going.

Most importantly, the scribes prey on the most vulnerable. They "devour widows' houses" (12: 40). Precisely what Jesus means emerges immediately in the next incident.

The so-called “widow’s mite” (12: 41-44)

Astonishingly, this passage has been treated in isolation from its immediate context in Mark’s narrative, and treated as an example of “Christian generosity” (the “Widow’s Mite”) – both in Sunday School and frequently in scholarly exegesis!

The context of the incident is Jesus sitting watching events in the Court of Women, where women went in and publicly put their offering into one of the thirteen trumpet-shaped chests around the walls. As they did so, they declared the amount and the purpose of the offering.

The offerings would be used for the upkeep of the temple and for the purchase of sacrifices. It was clearly public knowledge that the woman was offering the very last money she had, and was without means of getting more. Jesus is outraged because the temple system demands that she makes an offering – despite the scribes knowing that her only recourse, after putting in the very last money she had, was to sell her house, or her body. For Jesus, this is conclusive proof that the officers of the temple are “wicked tenants”, implacably pitted against God and God’s messianic purposes. The temple is the architect, officer and beneficiary of a slave-system, not a foretaste of the Kingdom.

Jesus foretells the temple’s destruction (13: 1-2)

The narrative is all of a piece. Jesus leaves the temple (literally and symbolically). The Galilean fishermen look back in awe at the huge edifice, apparently impregnable. It is an extraordinary feat of engineering. Herod the Great has had it constructed of building-size blocks of stone, hewn from quarries far away and transported at enormous cost. One of his disciples expresses his awe to Jesus. It is hard to imagine any of the disciples taking seriously Jesus’ reply: “Not one stone will be left standing upon another; they will all be razed to the ground!” (12:2)

Some 60 years later, Mark is writing at a time when the Roman legions are advancing south from the Galilee on Jerusalem. How should his church respond? Is this the Final Battle – the Davidic messianic war that the Jewish rebel recruiters are saying it

is? Is it their Christian duty to spring to Jerusalem's defence? Should they defend the temple with their lives as the dwelling place of Yahweh? Is this the God-appointed end of all history?

Jesus has just declared that the imperial vision of a restored temple state is not God's plan nor is it the role of the Messiah. He has declared the temple system terminally corrupt and prophesied its destruction. Next week, we will go on to hear Mark's answer to the questions his own church are asking.

Going deeper into the text (Mark 12: 35-13:2)

In this story there are many people around the Temple square. There is Jesus sitting opposite the treasury, 'well-to-do men' are putting money in the treasury and then the narrator introduces a widow on the scene. The widow put in two small copper coins. The situation is described in which the large gift of the rich contrasted the small, apparently insignificant gift of the poor widow. The widow's contribution was the equivalent of one sixty fourth of a denarius; a denarius was a normal pay for a day's work^[1].

In ancient Israel, widows were marginalised people. If they had no adult children to care for them, they were to marry one of their husband's kinsmen or be taken in by their husbands' families. If that did not happen, widows could face a life of excruciating loneliness and poverty. Worse, widows who were also childless became desperately miserable. They ranked among the most marginalized members of society. If no one took pity on them, they could live the remainder of their lives without hope or love. In the previous episode Jesus said that the scribes are to blame for the fact that widows lose their houses.

However, at this point the narrator introduced the disciples. Jesus invites his disciples to come and sit with him opposite the treasury. He wants them not to just look but to see. He wants them to become part of the action, to understand what

the writer is talking about and what it all really means. In this part of the narrative the tension is building up.

This is the first time that Jesus addresses the disciples since the party has arrived in the Temple court. In Mark 12:43 the narrator used the word 'calling' as an introduction to Jesus' teaching but also to remind us when Jesus called the disciples for the first time and asked them to follow Him and to leave everything behind.

Jesus makes sure he has the attention of his disciples by starting his sentence with 'Truly'. He invites the disciples into the story of contrast, a story of a large gift which cost so little and a story of a small gift which cost so much. He wants them to rest their eyes on the people with wealth; to see the scribes' fine robes sweep the pavement, their fine sandals and their fine jewellery. However he also wants them to see the poor and destitute, their tattered robes, their bare feet, their hungry look. Jesus invites me and you to sit with Him and let our eyes rest on the successful and the rich, the people with the well-cut suits, well-tailored outfits and up market shoes. The narrative raises profound questions about fairness and of justice but also about discipleship:

The humble widow who has put her two small coins in held a model of discipleship. She sacrificed her whole living and is also a foreshadow of Jesus who will give his life up sacrificially as a ransom for many. The placing of the story of the widow at the end of the passion predictions and the teaching of discipleship allows her to be seen as somebody who is ready and willing to leave herself behind. Her sacrifice that day was small but total. One might think she 'merely' put in two coins, one might think that the Messiah was 'merely' David's son, a human king amongst other kings but through Jesus, God has given himself totally

We as followers of Jesus are called to humble service. We need to see with fresh eyes and where we are called to leave ourselves behind and do humble service. Where we can bring the Kingdom of God in this world through justice and fairness? Sit alongside those rich people and the poor widow whose whole livelihood is

summed up in two small coins. What do you make of such stark inequalities? Sit alongside the top- paid executives of the major multi-national corporation or the top paid football player and the refugee, the homeless, the foodbank user. What do you make of such stark inequalities? Is that the way God intended things to be? How are you as his disciple bringing the Kingdom of God to them through justice and fairness?

So what is your verdict?

Sin in the Bible means more than individual acts of wrong doings. Individuals can be sinners, but all sins also have a social dimension because sins have social consequences. In this sense, then, sins become institutionalised and systematised in the structure, laws and customs of society. Personal sins are embodied in social structure through which our sins cause suffering in people and through which others are influenced to become sinners.

Mark offers us an analysis of structural sin in this reading. In the text Jesus contrast the powerful and the powerless and Jesus points to a difference of perspective between what society generally sees and what he sees. The reader can make the connection in the previous reading regarding the scribes that devour the widow's houses and the widow's poverty. She is not just a faithful giver but she is also a victim of the oppressive practices of the scribes. The temple system benefited the ruling elite.

The real danger with structural sin is that we often do not recognise it. For many years South Africa did not recognised the structural sin of Apartheid. In order to see structural sin for what it is we need those who are the victims to teach us. Therefore we have to reach out to the marginalised groups that experienced the structural sin such as the refugees, the homeless and the Food bank users to understand the inequality and injustice. As followers of Jesus we are called to address the structural sin in our context today.

All age worship ideas (Mark 12: 35-13:2)

One of the keys to good all age worship is to keep it simple and relatively short. Ideally aim for a service of 45-50 minutes. That's not to say a service can't be longer but if you are thinking of 1hr30+ think carefully about your use of space and above all else be creative, take risks and have fun – partying is integral to the kingdom but we'll leave that for a year on Luke...

Reflection - This story and the preceding verses are about the dishonesty over money. The religious leaders though unpaid have benefitted from exploiting others and engaged in economic oppression.

Along comes a widow who need not have contributed into the temple pot at all – she should be a beneficiary of its alms. However not only does she give but gives generously. Her offering may appear relatively tiny but in comparison to what others give it is everything. Her love for God is unquestionable in comparison with those who are charged to be the primary communicators of love.

This is both about money and motive. The attitude in which we give is not challenged by how much we give but how much we hold back for ourselves.

The widow is not giving to a system that she hopes will steward properly, rather she is giving her all in offering to the God she loves and who loves her. When we give do we spend too much time pontificating over how the money is used, managed, stewarded? Or do we give thankfully in accordance with the level of grace we have received in Jesus? An offering of love to the God who has held nothing back from us not least his Son?

Ideas (This is taken from Messy Church 3 Session 13 – Money Matters. Maybe this would be a good opportunity to do Sunday differently and have it Messy Church-style

worship)

Grab game – You will need: plastic coins taped to strings; other plastic coins without strings; a timer; long piece of string

Play in pairs. Player 1 has ten stringed coins in front of them. The loose ends of the strings are within their opponents reach. Player 2 has just coins in front of them (and the loose ends of string). Lay the long piece of string across the table to be the 'net' between the two players. Set the timer for one minute. Player 1 needs to try to grab the coins on strings as player 2 yanks them away one at a time. Player 1 has to try to keep his/her money. Player 2, as well as yanking the strings, is trying to flick coins into the others side of the court in order to give away all the loose money. Player 1 needs to flick the coins back as soon as they come over. At the end of the minute, player 1 gets a point for each coin on a string on his/her side and player 2 gets a point for every coin successfully on the other side of the 'net'.

Prayer – 1 Chronicles 29.14ff reminds us that everything we have comes from God. What we give to him has come from him. It calls us to change our attitude from thinking what we have is mine and mine alone to being a gift of blessing from God in order that with it God might be blessed through our generosity and stewardship.

If possible hold an 'African-style' offering where people bring their gifts to the front as they sing rather than place in a bag or bowl as it is passed. As people give let that be their act of gratitude for God's provision.

Also, if available, have some old pennies and an empty pot. Invite people after they have given to take a penny and pray that God might reveal how, where and to whom he wants us to be more generous. Place the coin in the pot as a symbol of the prayer made and the willingness to be more generous

Further activity – You may wish to put on a course at a local school or work with the young people in your church to help them think about budgeting, finance and money

through a kingdom lens. This is a link to one really good resource -
<https://capuk.org/get-involved/your-church/cap-money-course/kids>

Liturgies and hymns (Mark 12: 35-13:2)

This is where you can find hymn suggestions and liturgies for use with this week's text.

Just a thought from Psychology Today:

It's not news anymore, but it's still a surprise: the poor are more generous than the rich. "For decades, surveys have shown that upper-income Americans ... are particularly undistinguished as givers when compared with the poor.... lower-income Americans give proportionally more of their incomes to charity than do upper-income Americans." (See, "The Charitable-Giving Divide" in Sunday's New York Times Magazine.)

A PhD candidate at Berkeley, Paul Piff, recently repeated that finding - and more: "lower-income people were more generous, charitable, trusting and helpful to others than were those with more wealth. They were more attuned to the needs of others and more committed generally to the values of egalitarianism."

Maybe Jesus was not pointing an individual widows kindness but to a trait of a class of people that get thought of as scroungers and takers, a strain on resources.

For a better world

Generous God, we thank you:

For the gifts you have given us,

The abundance of your Creation,

And the beauty that surrounds us.

For the people whose lives have touched ours?

For the love they show,

The burdens they lift,

The hopes we share.

Compassionate God, we ask you:

To fill us with your love,

To place in our hearts a spirit of courage,

To move us to reach out to others in need.

And lead us to play our part,

So that now and in generations to come

All your children may share

In our hope for a better world.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,

Amen.

Written by Catherine Gorman/CAFOD for the Your Catholic Legacy consortium

Our Father

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Reader 1: We ask forgiveness for the times when we have not worshipped you and

Made your name holy, when we have been caught up in the desire to have more.

All: We pray that we may be open to hearing your voice and inspired to work for

Economic justice.

All: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Reader 2: We ask forgiveness for the times when we have not promoted the full

Dignity of men and women.

All: We pray in hope that discrimination and prejudice will give way to welcoming

All people to your banquet.

All: Give us this day our daily bread.

Reader 3: We ask forgiveness for the times we have not shared our resources with

Others.

All: We pray that we may be generous both with our possessions and our gifts and Live lives of solidarity.

All: And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Reader 4: We ask forgiveness for the times we have not been in right relationship With others.

All: We pray that your spirit of reconciliation may be made real within us.

All: And lead us not into temptation.

Reader 5: We ask forgiveness for the times when we have not believed that our Actions could make a difference.

All: We pray that we may work towards the common good, knowing that you are With us always.

All: But deliver us from evil.

Reader 6: We ask forgiveness for the times we have dismissed the sin of Environmental injustice

All: We pray that we may have the courage and conviction to act now to prevent Further destruction to God's beautiful planet.

All: For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever.

Reader 7: We ask forgiveness for the times we have prevented others from Flourishing, from reaching their full potential.

All: We pray for a child-like spirit, open to the wonder of creation and the diversity Of peoples, since the glory of God is the whole of creation and the whole of Humanity, fully alive. Amen.

Adaptation by Susy Brouard

Unlimited generosity (this could be used as a prayer of confession perhaps)

You asked for my hands

That you might use them for your purposes
I gave them for a moment then withdrew them
For the work was hard.
You asked for my mouth
To speak out against injustice.
I gave you a whisper that I might not be accused.
You asked for my eyes
To see the pain of poverty.
I closed them for I did not want to see.
You asked for my life
That you might work through me.
I gave you a small part that I might not get "too involved".
Lord,
Forgive me for calculated efforts to serve you
Only when it is convenient for me to do so, and
Only in those places where it is safe to do so,

Basic necessities of life

We pray for the Church throughout the world,
That she may be a voice for those who lack even the basic necessities of life,
Tirelessly serving them and calling for change.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer
We pray for the world's leaders,
That they may not hide behind their power or abuse it,
But work for the good of all humanity,
Particularly the poor throughout the world.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer
We pray for our local community,
That we may show our love through our respect for each other
And for our environment, gladly sharing what we have with those in need.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer
(Linda Jones/CAFOD)

Malaysian prayers

Lord Jesus, open our eyes so that we can recognise the injustice around us that is not always

Obvious.

Allow us to be moved by compassion for the victims of injustice and to act in accordance with your

Will, to defend the poorest and to save the children in need.

Amen.

Lord God, you feel so strongly about the needy,

The afflicted, the weak, and the imprisoned – and you love them so deeply.

Inspire the leaders among us to uphold the rights of the downtrodden

And to serve with fairness, justice and integrity.

Amen.

Anil Netto, Malaysia

Prayer to make poverty history

Christ our Lord,

Your light shines into the shadows,

And shows us

Where the obstacles to change lie.

We know that often

They are in our own hearts,

In the way we live,

And in our daily choices and actions.

We pray that we may accept

The light of your love

As a challenge to change

Ourselves and our world.

We pray that, each day,

We make the choices and

Take the actions

That will bring an end to poverty and hunger,
And lead us all
Towards a fairer world.
Be with us, Lord,
As we face your challenge
And learn how to live
Our lives in love.
Amen.

(Linda Jones/CAFOD)

Thanksgiving prayer

At your table, Lord
Bountiful God,
When we eat this bread,
And drink this cup,
Remind us that it is at your table
That we do it;
A table weighed down with good things,
A table full to overflowing.
Remind us that we have neither earned,
Nor deserve,
What you freely give.
For it is to the starving that you bring satisfaction
Whereas the full you send away empty.
Help us to respond to your invitation
By sharing what we have received,
By breaking the body and blood of creation with love and reverence,
And by adjusting our own wants so that no one is turned away.

(Ged Johnson/CAFOD)