

Jesus is people watching in the temple that day. He sees long-robed, long-winded folks -- who he doesn't seem to admire very much --- and the widow whose 'all' was her two coins, 1/64th of a day's wage in that time. The scribes are condemned not by Jesus not because of their long robes, but the scribes in the long robes are condemned because they are the leaders in a system / in which an offering of so little to the temple treasury could leave one destitute. The long-robed scribes are in a position to change that system, and yet they are not open to God working through them in order to make that change. Their focus seemed to be on themselves and their position in the community, not those in the community in need.

As I stand before you in a long robe, which I like to walk around in. I realize like the scribes I have the best seat in the sanctuary, and I've been known to say long prayers. I also really would like you to greet me with respect in the marketplace.....when you see me at Harmon's or Target. Those things I'm not going to feel guilty about however.

What makes my ears perk up is Jesus's warning about people who "devour widow's houses, and say long prayers for the sake of appearance...."

Now THAT I can feel guilty about. Because each week along with you, I pray for justice, without doing all I can to work for that justice. Because, as my daughter used to say, and like those scribes in the temple, my outsides don't always match my insides. I often use my faith or my treasure in trade ---- and sometimes my relationship with God seems to be more of a transaction than a covenant. I can convince myself that I have earned what I have, including God's good pleasure, and thereby close myself off to what more and varied gifts God might actually wish to give me. I limit what God can do through me by giving, without giving up control.

THAT is what I hear Jesus saying to me this morning even as he points to the scribes in the temple. When I close myself to God's goodness, I suffer; and those in need around me suffer, like the destitute widow walking past the long-robed, long-winded scribes.

We don't know the end of that widow's story. Perhaps Jesus ran to her to tell her her faith would see her through the lean times, to not be afraid. Perhaps he grabbed those in the long robes and demanded they look her in the eye, dig in their deep pockets and share with her of their abundance. Happy endings and evidence of changed fortunes, however, would not really change her story. Her faithfulness is rooted in her act of letting go of what she had and her control of what her future might be.

This morning we have lessons of trust and growth from the stories of TWO widows. The widow in the temple offered her fears to God along with her two coins. And Jesus is moved by her faith. Ruth trusted her mother-in-law Naomi's advice to find herself a loving husband and became King David's Grandmother. Ruth was not an Isralite, would not have been seen to be included in any covenant with God, but she is a model of fidelity and love, and her devotion to

the mother-in-law reminds us of God's devotion to the people of Israel. And all of us have blessed through her by Jesus, her descendant.

God can use any portion or person of God's creation to bless us. God can use us to be blessings ourselves when we let him, when we are open to the blessing received in the moment of letting go.

Words mean nothing if deeds don't back them up. And we have been asked by God to be carriers of God's word to a hungry, needy broken world. And that world needs what we, the church has to offer them: when they are fed, clothed, cared for and loved, God's word, God's love is real in their lives.

Our gifts of time and money and energy are gifts which are able to make our actions match our words. Our gifts of time and money and energy flesh out the words of God in action. We cannot be prophets, messengers of the good News, if we too cannot let go and trust God. We cannot carry the Good News if our hands are gripped around our goods, if our hearts are tied to the results, if our happiness depends on our expectations being fulfilled. rather than God's goodness.

God didn't need the widow's last two coins for the support of the temple. I'm here to tell you that God doesn't need our money. God doesn't need our gifts. God needs our giving. And giving requires us to have open hearts, and to let go. God needs our giving and God wants our trust.

Now, before the Finance Committee and the Stewardship Committee and the Vestry let by the Treasurer storms the pulpit, let me say that The Church of the Resurrection however, does need our money, and our gifts. We have been asked by God – and we have vowed through our baptismal covenant – to carry God' goodness and healing to a hungry, needy, broken world. That world needs what we, the church, have to offer. When we take it upon ourselves to feed, clothe, care for people, teach people about God's love, then and only then is God's love real in their lives.

Our offerings of time and money to this church are a gift which makes our mission – and our actions of a prayerful and open community – match our words, our outsides match our insides. When actions match words, and those words are of God's love, lives are transformed. We are transformed.

However, if our giving becomes a transaction --- if we give in order to receive; if we insist on controlling what comes of what we offer, we might miss the goodness God has in store.

If we limit our giving to a number we write on our checks, we restrict God's blessings to only what WE have planned, and restrict God's work to the boundaries of OUR imaginations. If we try to control what God gives us and how it is given, we might be incapable of receiving those things which are more than we can ask or imagine.

None of us can fully imagine what God might have in store for us in this place. But that doesn't mean we cannot work together toward it. As difficult as it is we must remind ourselves to offer our attachment to the results, along with our pledge cards of time and money.

God wants our willingness to let go, to follow the path without knowing the destination. When we give God that part of ourselves, we, like the faithful widow in the temple, give all that we have. And we will be blessed.

There is a limit to what we can do with OUR resources and OUR plans. But there is NO limit to what God can do through us if we offer him our open, and giving hearts.