

November 7, 2021  
Communion

Mark 12:38-44

### “Stepping Up”

How many of you know the name, “Snidely Whiplash?” Does this help? (Picture of Snidely whiplash) He was part of the show, wildly famous in its time, “The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show.” (Show opening picture of Bullwinkle pulling Rocky from a hat.) Snidely was as wildly mean and unkind as his arch enemy “Dudley Do-Right” was sickeningly sweet. (Show picture of Dudley) And the two of them would never have had much to fight over if it weren’t for “Lil.” (Picture of all three) The characters were a study in hyperbole...they had mass appeal because they were recognizable and easy to understand.

We often think in such generalizations – this person is all good – that person is all bad – this person is cute but helpless – and so on. But we need to take care in thinking in such broad generalities. We are in the time of year when we think about what *it means for us to engage our faith with the material realities of our lives*. A subject suitable for any time of year, of course, but one which shows up in the fall.

It is hard for us to go down this road without getting defensive. We imagine the nice people at church are warning us we can be like Dudley Do-Right and manage over the top righteousness which comes off as a bit ditsy – or we can be the mustache twirling dastardly villain whose interests are tying up helpless people and tossing them on the railroad track. (Picture of both Dudley and Snidely - 5)

Our text from Mark today probably doesn’t do a lot to keep us from this stark contrast between honorable and dishonorable. In fact, it might have provided source material for the creators of Whiplash and Do-Right. ***Jesus warns his disciples in today’s reading to not be like the scribes.*** And we don’t flinch. That sounds right to us. We might even imagine the scribes look a bit like snidely whiplash – mustache and all. We have learned over the years who the good guys and bad guys are...but our understanding can border on being, well, cartoonish.

Scribes were experts in the law. The law which was the gift of God. The law was at the heart of the identity of the community. The law helped us all to live the way God wants us to. ***They managed crucial information for everyone. And they***

**were honored for it.** To be warned to beware of them is to say, “Beware of your trusted leaders!” It seems as if Jesus is pointing at Dudley Do-Right and calling him Snidely Whiplash. There is good reason for us to wonder. If we are clear about the role of the scribes - Jesus’ warning must have felt odd.

And then there is the widow. The poor widow who came to the temple to make her offering to God. This is also outside our experience. It seems it was a *spectator sport* to go to the Temple and watch people put their offering in. Let’s be clear, this was the temple in Jerusalem. ***This was the World Series – not minor league.*** It was a resplendent place with important people. Many of those who came had met with their accountants before leaving home to get the right percentage of their wealth to give to the church. You know – to follow the rules. The biggest surprise to me in this passage is that Jesus and his disciples had pulled up a seat to watch. It was surely impressive. Lots of wealth would have been on parade – and then she came in. *The woman who didn’t get the memo* that this was the big time...that the competition would be too stiff for her. She walked in *as if she belonged* – and she pulled out two coins...*the smallest legal tender possible*...and dropped those tiny coins in that large container which effortlessly swallowed them. ***No one noticed her except to be embarrassed on her behalf. No one, except Jesus.*** We are told he called the disciples together – perhaps they were off buying a hot dog or a snow cone – to say, ***“Did you see that?! Did you see that!?”*** Jesus is the only one who saw a grand slam home run where others saw a swing and a miss.

These two passages together provide our glimpse into the kingdom of God. The Kingdom Jesus inaugurated – the place in which the values of our life on this earth are turned on their head. *Jesus says the amount given isn’t what matters.* But friends, ***the amount given is all we can see.*** At least its all we can see with other people. Which is why – *our consideration of what really matters in giving happens inside ourselves.* Are we giving to express love to God or because we feel guilty? Because giving makes us feel good? Or is it an obligation? Are we managing our selves or judging our neighbor? Only one of those makes sense.

Friends, God gives all the time. When we are grateful for what God has given us, we are motivated to be more like God - and give like God does. Give like the widow who expresses love in her gift. Gratitude leads to generosity. And we learn how to live more authentically as God’s child as giving brings us joy.

This is it really, our learning to give isn't about imagining we should be Dudley instead of Snidely. In truth, we are all a bit of both. Learning to give and giving with joy and passion is a holy skill we develop over time. ***It is not a spectator sport nor competition...it is an expression of love because we want to be like the one who has loved us first.***

So, take some time this week and think carefully about what will give you joy to plan to give to God through the church next year. ***Not because you have to but because you get to:*** Because it is one way we grow into being God's children. Those who look more like a generous widow than someone who believes the most important things in life are things. Let's do our best to step up as God's children and find joy in doing it.

Colloquial phrase “Step out” refers to: \* Dressing up in your best and going out to a nice place. Or being unfaithful to the one at home while out with someone else. The first one doesn’t seem to be applicable...the second feels very much like the challenges we have with Giving to God while we are fooling around with money.

Beware of the Scribes and Pharisees is tied in contrast to the widow who gives all she has. Scribes were respected, and the widow was not. Jesus view on giving wasn’t about social status – it was a question of motivation and process. Do we give because we “have to” or do we give because we want to. Do we give what is required...legal calculation – or do we give what feels right?

The Temple is an endangered species...but she gives to it as her way of giving to God. Giving so one can be seen is giving for our glory not God’s glory.

The amount is not the point...but it is about all we can see....

When we have little to give we are afraid to give for fear of being thought less of...

It was surely a spectator sport to sit in the temple and watch the people give...

Oohing and ahing over lavish gifts...from those who had calculated the gift from their wealth. In such a case the ability to give and the dedication of the giver were not calculated in who was admired and who was not.

To be fair – they were giving lots of real money. Which feels impressive to us. But Jesus says giving is more about us and less about what we give.

God gives all the time...and to be God’s children we learn to give. Like walking, this takes experience and time to get good at.

We are to develop the values of the kingdom – which do not mimic our understanding of who is important and what shows power. Turning the situation

on its head – she gave more – is predictive of the coming Kingdom we pray for in the Lord’s Prayer.

There was no coin smaller than the copper coin – worth about 1/100 of a days wage – which was half of what men were required to pay as a temple tax.

Not what we have – but devotion in giving – matters to Jesus.

“The first will be last and the last will be first...”

Ben Johnson – “You need to give more than the church needs your gift.”

If all we ever got was the widow’s mite – could our church survive? Perhaps not, but then – we are not all poor widows – are we?

The idea of the title is to step up as God’s child instead of stepping out to soothe our own sense of power and wellbeing.

To abandon faith in the temple is not to abandon faith in God – Jesus

prediction of the destruction of the temple – which everyone identified with

God. Which happens prior to this text. And if the temple goes away – how

shall sacrifices for sin be made? Jesus has that tied up as well.

Sunday before Celebration Sunday

<sup>38</sup> 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 marketplaces, <sup>39</sup> and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! <sup>40</sup> They devour widows’ houses and *for the sake of appearance say long prayers*. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

<sup>41</sup> He sat down opposite the treasury and *watched the crowd putting money into the treasury*. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup> A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. <sup>43</sup> Then 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*. <sup>44</sup> For 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.”