

“He is All You Have to Live On”

Mark 12:38-44

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

November 11, 2018

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, “And he called his disciples to him and said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

If the observance of the Reformation reminds us that the Church depends solely on the Word of Christ, and if the festival of All Saints reminds us that the Church depending on the Word of Christ *will* be brought safely out of the great tribulation and to the peace and rest known by the Church in heaven, then these following Sundays that close out the church year teach us to anticipate that deliverance, to hold fast, to remain hopeful. And this morning’s text does that by pointing us to the faith of a widow, as Jesus points her out to his disciples and says of her, basically, “She gets it.” She gets it. She contributes generously not as a proud show of good works, but in all humility and patience and dependence upon God’s deliverance. She gets it... that everything depends on God’s mercy, that we can be vulnerably dependent upon Him without being put to shame, and – therefore – our offerings can confess that hope in Him.

That's saying something on the Sunday after more than \$5 Billion was spent to gain power in a nation, and – with what result? – no one 'won outright,' everyone now depends on everyone else, and those who put the most money into these races to hope in the candidate of their choosing *lost*. I'm reminded of the psalm, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?... He who sits in the heavens *laughs*"... laughs in derision because rather than our offerings confessing the one in whom we trust, the masses throw their money behind candidates and politicians and warriors of social causes in whom to trust.

To "put your money where your mouth is" is intended to be a sign and confession of the certainty of your standing. Five billion dollars was spent on those in whom the masses put their trust... but it brought Americans no certainty, and it never *can* because – even if you win – you're putting your money behind sinners who don't or can't keep their promises (or, if they do, they can't live forever!). But the widow's two mites were a confession that she had every certainty in the promises of her God... even if these were her last two mites; indeed, specifically because these last two mites demonstrated how much she depended upon a merciful God... because of that, she could with a cheerful heart, 'give everything,' because upon God she depended for everything... and He would not let her be ashamed.

It's not unlike the widow of Zarephath in our Old Testament reading. She had a choice – depend on this last bit of wealth, or depend on the promises of God, no matter how impossible they seem under the current duress. And yet, did the Lord not prove Himself to be trustworthy? He delivered on His promises, just as His prophet told the widow God would. And, as I think I mentioned the last time I preached on this gospel text, no one asks what happened to the widow after she gave her final two mites... no one doubts that Jesus made sure she was cared for, that – even then – Jesus was appealing on her behalf to the Father. No one wonders if God provided for her... because, instinctively, we know that Jesus is trustworthy. If Jesus takes note of her, she will be cared for... because Jesus, our redeemer (a *redeemer*, by the way, is someone who purchases you out of your debt/need because they know you haven't the ability to provide for you own need / pay your own debt)... Jesus, our redeemer and intercessor and high priest, is trustworthy.

How often do the Scriptures speak of the trustworthiness of our Lord: In matters of God's holy will, the psalmist says, "The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are **trustworthy**." And, as that holy will includes redemption, St Paul writes, "This is a **trustworthy** saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." And, as that redemption is a certain hope we can hang on to even when we feel down to our last two mites, God himself tells

John at the end of Revelation, “Write this down, for these words are **trustworthy** and true.”

God and His Word are trustworthy and true... *He* is all you have to live on! Isn't that what Reformation Sunday was all about. And didn't last Sunday's All Saints Festival point us forward to the inheritance that is ours *because* God's Word and promises are trustworthy and true?

But the scribes in our text live as if God's Word is not trustworthy. You see, there's a difference between knowing the doctrine for the sake of knowing it, and knowing the doctrine in the sense that it shapes and informs and makes certain your whole way of life.

Certainly, the scribes make a show of knowing the doctrine, but they don't live it. As a pretense – to pretend they trust the Word of God – they make sure everyone sees their long prayers and their ceremonial display, but they live selfishly, think only of themselves, and are willing to devour the needy for their own gain. Ought there not be as much disdain for them as King David had when he heard the story of the rich man who took a poor man's lone sheep for the sacrifice rather than taking from the abundance of his own? Yes, how incensed was David, until it was pointed out to him that *he* was that rich man.

Likewise, we are incensed by the conduct of the scribes. We are incensed by the rich who make a show of giving, while

comforting themselves they still have much for themselves... But then we realize we do the same. We give our offerings in times of abundance, and withhold our offerings in times of need... and, though neither outward act is going to get us to heaven, it does show the doubt in our hearts whether God's Word is trustworthy and true. Jesus does not praise the woman because, in her poverty, she earned God's favor; rather, he praises her because the poor widow lived the life of faith, which is to say, she utterly depended upon God's mercy.

That's the same life to which the writer to the Hebrews calls us; it's the same confidence he reminds us is ours and ought be ours. We have every reason to give up our hope in earthly things – even to loosen our white-knuckled grip on the last, barest earthly comfort – because we have a far greater, far more certain hope: “For Christ has entered... into heaven itself (the writer to the Hebrews says), now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”

Consider what this means about your certainty of God's provision: We're closing in on Thanksgiving, when we usually focus on giving thanks to God for all of our stuff – material wealth, physical health, family, good memories, current comfort. But the writer to the Hebrews says our certainty in God's mindfulness toward us is that we have Jesus, Jesus who has entered on our behalf, when we had nothing with which to “hire” Jesus to intercede for us, not even two mites of righteousness or merit or worthiness, and yet: “there

goes Christ, entering on my behalf to plead to the Father to think on me though (as the Small Catechism) all of this is “without any merit or worthiness in me.” Nevertheless, by his blood and atonement on the cross, by his holy living and sacrificial dying, Jesus enters before the Father on my behalf.’

And, not only has Christ entered, but he’s entered into the true heavenly courts – not the earthly copies of the true things – but our high priest gives us a share in the true things themselves. He has entered the vault of true treasure, the throne room of true and everlasting supply. The inner courts and holy places wherein God has far more than a heavenly bean counter and piles of material stuff to give you, but wherein is the book of life and all the eternal treasures of salvation, forgiveness, the promise of the resurrection and the life of the world to come... so that you may have certain joy that *He is all you have to live on.*

With what joy the now-miteless widow, and with what joy *you* may contemplate that Christ now comes not just into a holy place made with hands, but gives meaning to all holy places made with hands wherein people gather to receive from Christ the riches and bounty of heaven itself!

How true that is for our holy place. It’s not the renovation of a sanctuary that makes the true things yours; but it *is* the visual confession of a sanctuary that clearly and boldly states that the true things of heaven are indeed yours... that you can say to the whole

world, “This is a place of reverence and piety and wealth *not* because we have sunk all our treasures into it and earned God’s ears, but because God has brought all His treasures to it and freely given us His attention. We who could not buy anything from Him, He now says ‘Come buy and eat without price.’ And, if He is going to feed and sustain me in heavenly things without price, why need I cling to even my last two mites when my heart of faith knows it is trustworthy and true that the true things of heaven are mine,” you can say. “He is all I have to live on”, you can say. You can say it because all of heaven is yours... yours because of Christ! Yours because your high priest stands between you and the Father and pleads your case on your behalf... and pleads your case by the merit of his own blood... and he promises to deliver to you the bounty of his great intercession. Indeed, weekly, he gives you a taste of the benefit from his intercession – he feeds you with holy things far more costly or valuable than anything earthly that two coins or generous weekly offerings could buy you... and in feeding you he sustains you in that blessed promise and your eager hope that he will appear again, he will *appear* – though now here with us in the invisible matters of the faith – he will one day appear to sight, not to deal with sin (that judgment’s been dealt with on the cross) but to deliver on his promise of the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come for those who are eagerly waiting for him.

So, consider all that you have to live on... it comes not from jars of flour or from two mites, or even from the riches of wealth or the scribe-like righteousness that looks the part, then devours the weaker neighbor in great fear and doubt of one's self-preservation. No, the "all" that you have to live on is Jesus Christ... Jesus who is and manifests to you the trustworthy Word and promises of God – the Word that promises you daily provision, "Consider the sparrows and the lilies, how the Lord takes care of them... are you not of more value to him than they?" – and that same Word that promises you salvation and oneness with God through Jesus Christ, "This is a trustworthy saying and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." – and that same Word that promises you your hearts' eager, vulnerable, hope in Jesus will not end in the poverty of shame, but *will* culminate in eternal life, "Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."

That's God's trustworthy Word to you, that you may put everything you have, all that you have to live on, into that hope, that confidence, that certain joy which is yours in Christ Jesus.

In the Name of the Father
 And of the Son
 And of the Holy Spirit.
 + AMEN +

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