

Mark 12: 38-44
Pymble 11 November, 2018
The widow's story

*Oh hello, you've caught me on my way to the temple.
My name is Ruth.
My parents named me in honour of the Moabite woman
in our Scriptures.
They admired her steadfast love towards Naomi
and often told me the story – introducing more details
as they thought I was old enough to bear them.
It's quite a racy story, you'll remember.*

*I love the story myself... and the name,
even though it caused me some trouble over the years.
"Ruth" people would scoff, "that's not an Israelite name."
And even though I was good Jew,
they would quote that bit from Deuteronomy where it says,
"No Moabite will enter the Assembly of the Lord,
not to the 10th generation..."
But my namesake Ruth lived a faithful life,
and is included in our Holy Books –
a magnificent example of loving kindness.
God even ensured she was able to re-marry
after being widowed as a young woman.*

*Actually, it is funny that my name is Ruth,
for I too am a young widow – my husband Azor,
outrageously killed by an over-zealous Roman soldier.
What a tragedy for me, and my 2 young children!
That soldier should have faced justice!
But, of course, nothing happened.
My friends and I appealed to the Temple leaders –
the Scribes and the Chief Priest – to use their influence.
You see they meet regularly with Herod,
and Pilate when he's here, and all their off-siders.
It's always talk, talk, talk. And drink, drink, drink.
Yes, we hear about the goings on.
The scribes promised me they would raise the matter,
and see that the soldier responsible for my husband's death
would face charges.
But after 4 years: nothing.*

*I heard a rumour early on, and I quite believe it,
that the Scribes agreed to drop the matter
in exchange for a boost of funds for the completion of the Temple.
"There's only a poor widow," they must have reasoned,*

*“she’s not well connected. We can make this go away.”
(resigned) And I guess they were right...*

*You know the really sad thing is
they probably thought they were doing God’s work
by helping the Temple get built quicker.*

Ahh that building...

*Herod always uses the Temple
as a bargaining tool with our leaders
and they just go right along with him.*

But how can they?

*How can they compromise God’s justice
by using God’s building as an excuse?*

I can’t see God being happy with that!

*Honestly, I don’t know why I had any hope at all.
We all know how corrupt the Scribes and priest have become.
It’s like they are just stooges for whatever the Romans want.*

*We all see the priests up there in the holy place,
leading the sacrifices, saying all the words,
yet at the same time they are betraying our people!*

*Little wonder the prophets said
that to obey God is better than sacrifice;
and that our prayers and sacrifices mean nothing
unless your lives are in order and justice is being done.*

(angry) There was no justice for me, I can tell you!

*How we need another of those prophets
to shake things up again.*

And then the scribes! With their long robes and fancy words.

*You know, in the Temple Courts one day,
I asked one of them a heartfelt question.*

*It was just after Azor had died, and I was a mess,
and I asked him where was God’s justice at times like this?*

I really wanted to know.

I needed some comfort from the Holy Books.

Well, I didn’t understand a word he said.

*It was all, “It is written...” and “Behold the Torah says...”
waxing lyrical and drawing a crowd,*

*but he never once looked me in the eye
or enquired after my children’s welfare.*

Though he did seem interested in what sort of house I lived in...

*And then he announced, “Let us pray”
and prattled on with his long words*

so that everyone was impressed.

But I felt so lost and empty, I snuck away

so that when at last he opened his eyes, I was long gone. Ha!

*But you know, for those professional religious ones,
it's like religion has just come down to words.
No heart, no soul, just empty words... and the social connections.
You see it at the festivals – who are they with?
They're with the wealthy business-types and the Roman officials
and the beautiful people... and always in the best seats –
oh yes, they love that life!*

*So you see, we regular people are in a bind.
We love our God, we love our Jewish traditions,
we even love what the Temple should be about –
the worship, the community, the Scriptures – we love all that!
But we know the Temple leaders are crooked.
We know their sidling up to Rome corrupts their integrity
as those who should be representing God.
So what do we do?
do we support the institution
even though we are aware of the corruption
or do we withdraw our tithes and support
in order to “send a message”?*

It's like we are between a rock and a hard place.

*For me... well, all I have is 2 small coins,
so that's hardly going to make a difference.
But this is the day I usually take my coins
to the Temple Treasury.
I call it my little walk of thankfulness;
on the way remembering my friends who have been so good to me,
being thankful for my children,
recalling fondly Azor and his kindness...
So that is where I am heading now to make my offering
not to the Temple building, not to the Temple leadership –
No Thanks!
But to God.
God who's been close these last 4 years... well, mostly.
God who really is what the Psalms say he is:
a rock and a refuge,
a very present help in trouble,
a mother bird in whose wings I can take shelter.
Yes, this is the God to whom I owe my love and devotion.
He deserves my everything!*

*.....
You know, someone told me that the other day
a Galilean caused a stir in the Temple courts.
He upturned tables
and poured out the coins of the money-changers.*

*They said it was like one of the prophets of old
making a statement about how rotten the Temple had become.
Apparently the same man
has been debating the scribes and Pharisees everyday this week
and always coming out on top.
Well, all power to him I say. May God bless his efforts.
It's about time someone stood up to them.
Let's hope it comes to something at last!*