**11/10/24**

**Fully Committed For and To Christ**

**Mark 12:38-44 (NRSVUE)**

Good morning to all of you out there on our conference call, and all of you out there in our pews. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

What a day we have on tap here being able to welcome these new members into our church family. However, before we go hit up lunch and fellowship time, I need to lead with the real business we have at hand. I need to lead with the message we get from scripture. It is by no coincidence as I go along my learning path that I am standing in this pulpit for the second straight day. Now, I can only hope that yesterday’s sermon and eulogy went over well and paid honor to the very life and legacy of Debbie West. I also hope that I am not tripping all over myself up here as a result of having to write sermons for back-to-back days this week. However, I am pretty certain that I will not be, because these words really flowed out following all of my reading and studying. I was actually able to compose this sermon by pretty much sitting down and continuing to hit the keys almost all the way through, and not having to look back on various parts of my research. Things must have really set in from Pastoral Bible Study last Monday, and everything else I went over and reviewed. I can also assure you that I did not do it on my own, as I know for certain that the Holy Spirit really stepped up and stepped in to guide me here. Thanks be to God for that for sure!

I must admit that I did obviously revise today’s Sermon this morning, as it was still in its raw form from Friday’s initial composure. I came to realize that I got to see the very message I would be preaching about this morning shown several times over the last few days. First off, I had initially thought back to Debbie and her life of service. It was a life of giving whether she was in the military, working in the healthcare field, volunteering at the library or other places, and providing peace and comfort through various projects like the prayer shawls she created. Debbie’s heart was always focused on God, and she tried to be more Christlike when she was provided with the opportunity. I also thought back to the very wedding we were blessed to attend on Friday evening. There was so much in the ceremony and in the reception that showed love for one another, families, friends, and most importantly our Lord. These two committed their lives to one another in unity, but they did not do so without the blessing and very guidance of Christ. They were going all in for one another, but doing so with our Triune God at the forefront of everything.

Now, you may be sitting there and thinking to yourself what exactly all that has to do with today’s Gospel Reading. My answer is plain, simple, and straightforward. It has everything to do with today’s Gospel Reading! For we need to take our focus off of the people and the scenes set here, and make our brains work alternatively. We need to fight and wrestle with the text, and really get everything we can out of it. I know that it is very easy to get caught up here in the judgment of the scribes or even the money that clinks in the coffer from the widow. However, those are only images to draw on the real point that we need to get to. That very real point is that if we are not living our lives fully committed for and to Christ then we have some work to do. Does that make sense? Well, if it does not make sense to you right out of the gate then I assure you that we will definitely dive in here a little more, because I did not read and study as much as I did for no reason. I also did not do it to keep it all to myself. This is where we all can grow together by studying and really looking into the message delivered to us from the Gospel here today.

So, what are we really talking about here in life when we speak of being fully committed for and to Christ? We are talking about a life of trust and faith. That very widow could have been young or old, because the story does not tell us despite all of the pictures we have seen over the years. She could have even come down on hard luck when her husband died before his time. Just maybe her husband did not manage his property or finances the way he would have desired had he actually known he was nearing his death. Maybe they could not have had children so that she would have someone to take care of her as she grew older. Just maybe her husband’s brother or brothers passed away before he did, and there was no additional family to support her. Maybe she just honestly had no real desire to remarry, or maybe she did not feel it was right to do so because of the customs and practices of the time. Regardless of all of those things that could have presented us with a little better background story we do know one thing for certain. She was heading into that religious establishment and going all in! She was giving up what she had not because she believed in the building fund, but because she believed in a God that she knew she had to give for and to. Now, maybe she was hoping that someone spotted her and would consider stepping up just like the community should and support her, but we do not actually know this. What I find even more interesting is that she did not know was that Jesus actually had his eye on her, and for that fact she did not know that she was going to be a teaching point for the disciples as Jesus imparted an extremely important message on them that day. I can tell you this much though. That widow was fully relying on the fact that God would handle things for her whether she continued on the rough path she was on and she lost every earthly thing including her life, or if things managed to turn around by the very grace that is delivered to each and every one of us.

Now, don’t you go and think I forgot about the other part of the story here either. Furthermore, don’t you go and think that I forgot to thank all of you for your presence here today. That is what is so awesome about being able to wrestle with the Word, and to be up here speaking with you all and giving you an alternative mindset. I did not just go to Pastoral Bible Study on Monday in Somers Point or read several things for me. I did it for you too, and I did it for the very people that you might go on out there and share your faith with as well. We build one another up, and we make one another think differently. We do this together as the congregation of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, and as the very community of believers that gather here in this very place and on the Conference Call. I actually welcome your feedback after each Worship Service, or during the week following my sermons. For that is how I grow. I come to you vulnerable each and every time that I step in this very pulpit and deliver my sermon, because it may not be what you thought or expected to hear, and it may very well not be what you like to hear either. However, I do it just for the simple cause that the widow displayed in our Gospel Reading today. I do it to show that I am doing my best each and every day to live fully committed for and to Christ. However, I always know that I have some work to do as well. I know there are several things I can sharpen and fix up. I also know you all will hold me accountable, and I will hold you all accountable for that very fact as well. There is a reason that Proverbs chapter 27 verse 17 states that, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (2) For we are in a house of people of faith, and we are dealing with one another as believers in Christ and the very grace that we received from his death and resurrection. What amazing faith this widow showed in today’s Gospel Reading! The very difference between her and you and I is the fact that she did not even have the full story, or even know that the man watching her would be the one to redeem her; let alone you, I, and everyone else that comes to believe. She may or may have not read it in the scriptures, but it had not come to be quite yet. So, I ask, why do we act any differently despite knowing the entire story?

Now, I know that I could probably end there, and you all would be very happy. For we know that there is cake and food in the next room, and we are looking forward to welcoming all of these new members. However, I would be doing you and I a great disservice by not hitting on the front end of our Gospel Reading. I would not be standing on the very principles of being a Vicar and Seminary Student in this very setting.

So, let’s move on as we begin to close up shop here. Now, if verse 40 did not hit you during the first reading through then let me offer it up to you once again. “They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” (2) This “they” is not merely the scribes and those in power back in the day. This “they” is actually us here and now. That is why the Word is alive and active folks! We hear about these folks who go around dressed all nicely, expect to get seats of honor and prestige everywhere they go, expect to be looked at as if they are smart instead of sly, and act with a fake front instead of putting on their true selves. Now, why is this? How does this even apply to you or I? If you are sitting there really pondering those things then you really did miss what I am going to talk about here. Do you remember what I said earlier, that simple answer? If we are not living our lives fully committed for and to Christ then we have some work to do. For you and I can go out of our house each and every day with our new or fancy clothes on, our new or expensive shoes, our beards shaved and our make-up and hair done, our jewelry on, and whatever else we think might make us look great outside of the confines of our very own homes. We can go and buy stuff with our money, checks, debit cards, credit cards, or apps we might have on our smart phones. We can even buy stuff that we do not need, or even know that we simply cannot afford. However, we actually feel that we might need that stuff, or that others actually might be out at the store around us and they actually need to see that we can fill our carts or the belt at the checkout. They need to see that we are doing okay, and can even be able to sit in the pews around them each Sunday. Well, well, that could not be anything further from the right response. We are those sly or fake people living out there at times, just as much as we are the people at home sitting around in our pajamas, with our glasses still on, and huddled up over a cup of coffee and bowl of cereal. We need to bridge the very gap of the people that we are at home with the very people we are out in the community. We need to make sure that we are putting more attention on living our lives fully committed for and to Christ. We surely can do the work, and we can be more authentic versions of ourselves. We can even share with others that we like to read the scriptures at home, or that we like to read some Christian books, or that we even like to listen to some Christian music outside of our homes as well. We can share those very same ideals on the various platforms of social media that are out there as well. For no matter what this world hands us our lives and responsibility will always be to serve, love, and care for one another. We are not to act like the scribes, we are to act like the widow we hear about today. We are to go and share and give knowing fully that the Holy Spirit is with us and in us, and knowing that God and Jesus expect nothing else. Our Triune God expects our very commitment because we were created and beautifully made in his very image. The widow knew that, hard times or not, and we know that as well when we slow down and really focus on things.

So, I challenge you to really think about all that I have shared with you today. I challenge you to really begin living your lives fully committed for and to Christ. Now, you may say that you are already doing that, and I will say good for you. However, I will still challenge you to dig a little bit deeper. To really look inside of yourself. To pose this very question to yourself…. What more can I actually sacrifice for and to the one who sacrificed everything for all of creation, for each and every person, for you and for me?

Amen.

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 The presence of one destitute widow questions the reason for the temple’s existence

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 Contributed by Richard Schwedes on Nov 8, 2018

 Scripture: Mark 12:38-44

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Mark 12:38-44 (NRSVUE)**

 After engaging in a series of public arguments with religious leaders in the

 temple, Jesus contrasts the proud and oppressive ways of those leaders with the

 sacrificial humility and poverty of the widow.

 38 As [Jesus] taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in

 long robes and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces 39 and to have the

 best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! 40 They devour

 widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will

 receive the greater condemnation.”

 41 He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into

 the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put

 in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43 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. 44 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.”

**(Not Used)**

**Theme Statement: What is God doing in or behind this text?**

**(Active verb, saving or empowering action, complete thought, and a simple short sentence)**

**(Not Used)**

**Four Page Method**

**Page One (Trouble in the Text) (Characters Only)**

**Page Two (Trouble in the World) (Us Only)**

**Page Three (Grace in the Text) (God & Characters)**

**Page Four (Grace in the World) (God & Us)**

**(Not Used)**

**Sermon Unity Elements: The Tiny Dog Now Is Mine**

**Text (41-42):**

**Theme (42-48):**

**Doctrine (48-50):**

**Need (50-52):**

**Image (52-56):**

**Mission (56-57):**