

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

Mark 12: 41 – 44 (NIV)

The Woman with the Coins

Jesus watches, sitting down. Something like a quiet drama unfolds in front of him. What are people doing here, and how? The rich people, of which there are many, come and throw, large amounts. There's so much of it that it's uncounted, we don't have the exact sum here. They are so rich that they throw the money in, almost carelessly, as if it's not valuable, as if it's simply surplus, as if they're not thinking about what they're doing. On the other hand, and this is where things get interesting, and where Jesus' attention focuses: along comes a woman, who is poor, who is a widow. And we know exactly how much she puts in. It is a very little amount and in normal terms it is worth very little.



Those very rich people throw their money in as if they care little about it. As if they are without care, or perhaps careless. Perhaps also care free? Do they care for themselves as little? Do they have cares for themselves, or for others? Is the way they treat their gift-giving symbolic of the way they treat themselves, consider themselves, as if they have so little worth they can be thrown away with negligence, without concern. It is like a self-destructive gesture, saying: I don't care about what I have or don't have, I don't care about myself. Perhaps I don't feel cared for. So I shall say so by throwing myself away. I destroy myself before anyone else can. Their actions are terribly sad and disturbing.

The woman puts in two coins, she doesn't throw them away. Meaning she considers where she is, where the receptacle is, what she has in her hand, what and when she is giving, how she places her gift. She knows what she has, knows it and considers it well.

Is she more acutely aware of the value of life and of herself? If she considers herself as she considers her offering, what she gives, does she consider herself to be valuable, to be worthy of respect, as she respectfully and carefully gives her offering?



When Jesus sees what is happening he wants to show it to others. He calls his disciples, his friends to him and tells them something, in much the same way that he tells them a story or a parable: listen to this story and you will hear things and understand things that you may not have understood before. Things will be revealed to you about yourselves, your lives, about God and about other people. Out of the crowd of people, the many people, Jesus notices this single woman who makes a very small gesture that reveals something huge and wonderful and important, and Jesus finds this so important that he wants to share it with his friends. He wants to tell them the good news: "She put in everything!" The all is extraordinary, the everything is the wondrous sign of God. The others there gave out of their surplus, but this woman gave everything, in other words she gave herself. It is a gesture that speaks of the nature of God's love: God gives us life and love without holding back, without taking back, without regret, without condition. That is what God is and that is what God gives us, and that is what God also creates us to be. We are made in God's image. God has created us in God's image. Generosity, love, not holding back or taking back, giving freely, all these things belong to God but they belong to us too, from the moment we come into being through the act of love that is God's creation. We *also* can live like this.

There are many times in the Gospels where Jesus comes across someone and recognizes God in that person, and it always affects him. And other people recognize God in Jesus too. When the woman comes to anoint him in Bethany and to pour perfume over him, he sees God's love in her and in what she does, and he tells the others: "She has done a beautiful thing to me!" When he meets Zacchaeus, who is so moved by this meeting that he can't stop himself pouring out his desire to give his wealth away, Jesus exclaims: "Today, salvation has come to this house!" When Jesus meets a man who asks him about eternal life, and tells him all he has done, Jesus looks at him and loves him. And just

before Jesus' passion, when he washes his disciples feet, Jesus tells them that they too are capable of sharing in God's love, of recognizing it in themselves and in others, of honouring one another in this way. And what is more, if they do this, if they enter into this way of living, they will be blessed:

"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13: 17, 13: 34 (NIV)

We can and will recognize God in ourselves and in each other as Jesus did.

