

Pentecost 24 11/8/15  
Mark 12:38-44 27B

## SERMON TEXT IS APPOINTED GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM THE 12<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER OF MARK'S GOSPEL

OK, I'm just going to say it...before God and all creation – the Duke, John Wayne, is the greatest actor of all time. The way I figure it, in the world according to Heller – and remember my world is very small – the two key ingredients for a movie to be good are horses and guns. And, John Wayne made a lot of great movies that featured both horses and guns.

And you are wondering, because you are Lutheran -- what does this mean? What does John Wayne have to do with our readings today? Simply this – in our Gospel this morning, Jesus contrasts two quite different types of people – religious hypocrites and those of true faith. “Hypocrite” is a word we hear often used. But, what does it mean? “Hypocrite” is the Greek word for .... “actor”. What does an actor do? An actor plays a role. The man John Wayne put on a costume and played the role of US Marshall Rooster Cogburn. But, remember – the man John Wayne never became a US Marshall named Rooster Cogburn; the actor was just pretending to be something he was not. In that same way, a religious hypocrite is just pretending to be something they are not; a religious hypocrite is not a true saint of the faith.

In our Gospel, Jesus' warns against religious hypocrites,

“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.”

These scribes are both bullies and hypocrites. They worked hard to maintain a high and honored standing in the community. Then they misused their position to victimize the less fortunate in society.

Then there is this “poor widow [who] came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.” This woman caused Jesus “to [call] his disciples to him and [say] 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.’” The important point here is not that this woman gave everything, but that she trusted God to supply all her needs.

It is very possible that this widow was one of the widows who had been swindled by the scribes whom Jesus condemned. The words that praise the widow condemn these hypocrites, for they stand idly by and -- notice – they do nothing to help her. Jesus’ words are a true lament over those fat with cash, who see this poor widow, and do nothing for her. He laments even more for those who cheated her out of her life’s savings. Those hypocrites were wealthy on the outside, but their hearts were poor on the inside. They would do well to remember the words of Jesus, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life” (Mk 8:36)?

On the other hand, Christ’s words praise the Holy Spirit’s gift of faith that allowed this poor widow to experience the joy of giving to the Lord. Christ’s words in the original Greek literally read, “... from her poverty, as much as she had, she threw her whole life.” Jesus looked beyond the coins and saw a woman who loved God with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength. She placed her life savings into the treasury. Jesus saw that she

knew her life was in God's hands. She may have been poor on the outside, but her heart was truly rich on the inside.

By definition, hypocrites are people who fool others into thinking that they are Christians and, at the same time, **do not** believe. They look like Christians on the outside, but only God can see that their hearts have no faith.

The sad thing is that they are quite knowledgeable in what others expect of Christians. They know enough to fool others into thinking they are devout. But perhaps, the saddest hypocrites are those who are such great actors that they fool even themselves. No doubt many of the scribes thought they were the epitome of righteousness. No matter how sternly Jesus warned them, they refused to listen to Him.

So, where do you fit into the story? Are you the widow, or are a scribe? Of course, we all want to be like the widow, right? **OR**, could it be that you just want people to think that you are like the widow. After all, she threw her whole life on the Lord. Have you really thrown your whole life on the Lord? Or, does it make you feel just a little bit more than uncomfortable to think about trusting solely in God? Remember that God judges the heart. What does your heart look like?

Ask yourself a few simple questions. Have you ever mouthed the words of the Lord's Prayer perfectly while thinking about lunch? Do you start getting antsy when God wants to give us a few extra gifts on Sunday morning and the service runs a little long? Do you become disappointed, maybe even angry, when you do something nice for someone and no one notices? Are you thinking, "There are some real hypocrites in this congregation, I hope they are listening to this sermon?" Let's face it. The mirror of the Law shows us that we are more like the hypocritical scribes

than we care to admit and Jesus said that hypocrites “will receive the greater condemnation.”

But, fortunately for us and for our salvation, someone has “thrown in a whole life” for us. Just as this poor widow offered her whole life at that offering box, so the Holy One of God offered His whole life on the cross. Here is One who was never a hypocrite – who never did anything that deserved condemnation. And yet, here is One who endured the greatest condemnation and made payment for the sins of the world. When Jesus Christ suffered and then died on the cross for us, He offered up His life as the perfect sacrifice that satisfied the justice of God.

Because Jesus Christ lived a perfect life that was free of hypocrisy and all sin, the grave could not hold Him. Although His friends laid Him in the tomb on Friday, He rose from the dead on Sunday. He now lives forever and offers us a whole life. Through His sacrificial death and His triumphant resurrection He offers us forgiveness for all our sins, including the sin of hypocrisy. **AND** where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God and the water of our baptism to give us the same faith that the poor widow in today’s Gospel had. He works through the Word of God as we hear the readings and the sermon and He works through the visible Word with the bread and wine, as we eat His body and drink His blood in the sacrament. The faith that the Holy Spirit gives us, receives the gifts that Jesus Christ earned for us as He gave His life for us. The faith that the Holy Spirit works in us through Word and Sacrament, gives us a place in the Kingdom of God. In that kingdom, we receive forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The world often accuses us by saying, “The church is full of hypocrites.” Well, OK. But, don’t lose sight of things from God’s perspective. The real difference between the world and the church is that the church is full of hypocrites **who are forgiven**. It is also full of thieves **who are forgiven**, liars **who are forgiven**, murderers **who are forgiven**, and adulterers **who are forgiven**. The church is full of sinners **who are forgiven**.

As we approach the end of the Church year, our worship focuses on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of our Lord Christ. The day is coming when Jesus will come in all of His glory and we will leave this world behind and enter, body raised and reunited without immortal soul, the eternal joy of heaven. And we will be forever with Him who threw in His whole life for us. Amen