

NOVEMBER 7, 2021  
24<sup>TH</sup> Sunday in Pentecost



**St. John United Church of Christ**  
**10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL**  
**397-6323**  
**Rev. Rosemary Captain**

**\*CALL TO WORSHIP:**

God's Word called into being the pumpkins,  
the geese who fly south, the leaves which litter our  
lawns.

**In awe, we come into the presence of the God of  
vivid imagination.**

God's arms reach down and gather up  
children, lovingly placing us in grace's lap.

**In joy, we reach up to the God who loves us**

**completely.**

God's Spirit fills our lungs, so we can cry out for  
justice for the broken, the young, the old, the  
abandoned of our time.

**In service, we join with our God to build hope in our  
world.**

**\*CALL TO RECONCILIATION:**

We bring our flawed lives to God, not so much to be  
made perfect, but to be whole. Let us confess our  
sins to God, trusting the One who builds joy from our  
despair.

**\*UNISON PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS:**

Bountiful Love: our self-focus causes us to imagine  
how poor we are. We are convinced we don't have  
enough:

enough honor,  
enough respect,  
enough recognition,  
enough to live on.

And so, in our poverty, we cannot trust you, we  
cannot see the emptiness of others, we cannot help  
but cling to more than we need.

Forgive us, Bestower of Blessings. Tell us we can  
be more loving; whisper to us of how we can be more  
compassionate; sing to us of how we can serve

others - all in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

*Silence is kept*

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

The good news is that we are made whole; not by our efforts, not by any work we have done, not by any word of ours.

Out of the riches of grace, God pours forgiveness into our lives, giving us all we need in Jesus Christ, so we might live in hope and joy. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**\*GOSPEL: Mark 12:38-44**

<sup>38</sup> As he was teaching, he said, "Watch out for the legal experts. They like to walk around in long robes. They want to be greeted with honor in the markets. <sup>39</sup> They long for places of honor in the synagogues and at banquets. <sup>40</sup> They are the ones who cheat widows out of their homes, and to show off they say long prayers. They will be judged most harshly."

<sup>41</sup> Jesus sat across from the collection box for the temple treasury and observed how the crowd gave their money. Many rich people were throwing in lots of money. <sup>42</sup> One poor widow came forward and put in two small copper coins worth a penny.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>43</sup> Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I assure you that

this poor widow has put in more than everyone who's been putting money in the treasury. <sup>44</sup> All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had, even what she needed to live on."

This is the word of God. It is true and can be trusted.

**Thanks be to God.**

**MESSAGE: "It all comes from God"**

The tradition is that this story of the two mites given by the poor widow is the passage to be read on stewardship Sunday. "She gave all she had. You need to put more money in the church offering baskets." The preacher wants to make you feel guilty.

However, I would invite you to take a different look at this passage. I don't remember reading a passage where Jesus makes us feel guilty if we don't put more money into the offering basket. Instead, Jesus is using this image as a comparison.

Jesus was teaching the people and disciples about the hypocrisy of the scribes. He described them as lusting for recognition, seeking the best positions, stealing from the helpless, yet making a pretense of being religious. Sitting in the women's court where the offering receptacles were located, Jesus used one

woman as an example. The comparison is spectacular.

Widowhood was one of the most vulnerable positions of the time. A widow had less capacity for earning than slaves; and unless she had family or friends to protect and help her, she was most likely destitute and perhaps homeless.

This particular widow was down to her last two mites (a fraction of a penny). Jesus drew the attention of the disciples to this woman, who brought delight to his heart. The sound of her tiny offering as it dropped into the metal receptacle must have been pitiful compared with the rattling of the many coins from the rich. They had apportioned a small percentage of their wealth; she had little, but all she had was given to God.

In the passages we have been reading, Jesus makes a series of charges against the temple scribes. The scribes liked to walk about in flowing robes. A long robe which swept the ground was the sign of a notable person. It was the kind of robe in which no one could either hurry or work, and was the sign of the leisured man of honor. In all events they liked to dress in such a way that it drew attention to themselves and to the honor they enjoyed. The Pharisees valued themselves highly upon their exact

skill in the law of their fathers and made people that they were highly favored by God.

When I read about these temple authorities, there was one thing I was surprised by. An expert in the law could take no pay for his teaching. He was supposed to have a trade by which he earned his daily bread. But these legal experts had managed to convey to people that there was no higher duty and privilege than to support a Rabbi in comfort; that, in fact, such support would undoubtedly entitle him or her who gave it to a high place in the heavenly academy.

It is a sad fact that religious charlatans have always preyed upon vulnerable people, and it would seem that these scribes and Pharisees imposed on people who could ill afford to support them. Unfortunately, these practices still happen.

Actually, this was the last event of Jesus' public teaching. (Crucifixion loomed near.) The act of this humble, needy widow seems to summarize his teaching. She was not meeting a great need, but rather she was recognizing that everything belongs to God. Because she was in God's hands, she would willingly and joyfully offer all she had back to God. What did the temple authorities offer back to God?

So, yes, this is a story of stewardship. However, its not always about money. Its about gratitude to the one who gives us everything. God!  
Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** Beginning with a time of silent, personal prayer.

Dear Almighty God, you give us so much and many times we forget to say “thank you.” Sometimes it’s hard to see how you, God, gives us all we need. Yet it could be in the most mundane way. You give us the opportunity to find a trade or job, if we accept it. And thus, you give us a good living for us and our family. You give us other people who we can serve and lift up. The poor is always with us, in order that we have the opportunity to share with others. We are grateful, God.

This day we pray for all those on our prayer list and those who are in our hearts. We pray for those affected by floods, tornadoes, earth quakes, and volcanoes. We pray for our government that they may serve all of us fairly. We pray for our church here in Fairview Heights and all around the world that they may bring the light of your love to all. We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus.

**THE LORD’S PRAYER:** Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed it be your name. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as, we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.  
Amen.

**INVITATION TO SHARE:** With joyful hearts, we offer our gifts and ourselves to God.

**\*PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

Imagining we are very poor, we think our gifts don't matter, and so give very little. Yet, from the abundance of your love, you challenge us to be as faithful as the woman Jesus speaks about. Make us more generous and gracious givers, even as you take what we offer in these moments, and use them in the work of your kingdom. Amen.

**\*HOLY COMMUNION:**

**Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

May God watch over you!

**And also over you!**

Offer your hearts to the One who creates new life for those who are empty.

**We bring our lives to God, the restorer of new life.**

People of God, give thanks to the One who gives us all things.

**We praise the One who is abundant beyond all expectations**

Once and for all, you spoke, God of overflowing gifts: as your Word called the sun to shine and the earth to spin; as your hand stirred the dust, shaping us in your image; as your Spirit breathed grace into our empty lungs.

You would feed us with peace, but we gnaw on the bread moldy with anxiety; When you would clothe us with glory, we put on the long robes of sin, the hems dragging through dusty death.

In vain, the prophets rose early to speak your words of invitation; in vain, they stayed up into the late hours, watching for our return to you.

Yet, out of the abundance of your love, you sent Jesus to us, so that we might not live in the poverty of our despair and fear.

With the poor, the forgotten, and children on the streets, we join our voices as we sing to you:

**Holy, holy, holy! Lord God of grace!  
All creation is filled with the bounty of your love.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is he who has not left us without hope.  
Hosanna in the highest!**

You are holy, God of wonder and wisdom, and blessed is Jesus Christ, our Brother, who left you, in faith and obedience, to enter humanity's world, not as a mere copy, but truly one of us. Again and again, he pointed to you: Restorer of broken lives, Nurturer of every hungry heart, Lover of each child. Sitting opposite death, watching as we went down to its threshing floor, he offered himself in our place, putting in everything he had, so we might receive the gift we need to live on with you.

Remembering his gentleness and generosity, remembering his compassion and clarity, we speak of that mystery we call faith:

**Christ died, once, and it was for all;  
Christ was raised, once and for all;**

**Christ will return, for those who wait for him,  
to bring them home to God,**

Once and for all, pour out your Spirit upon those who gather around your bountiful Table, where life and love are placed.

You nourish us with your bread so, that fed, we may serve those who hunger for hope in their lives.

You restore our flagging spirits from the overflowing cup of joy, filled with gentle grace, so, that refreshed, we may take new life to the poor and hopeless in every place where they are found.

And when the foundation of the world is no more,  
when we enter that haven made by your hands,  
when we sit with our sisters and brothers  
at the feast where we are fed from your heart,  
we will offer glad songs of joy to you,  
God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

**\*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

**We give thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the**

**power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.**

**BENEDICTION:**

God sends us out into the world.

**We will gather up God's children and bring them to the lap of grace.**

Jesus invites us to watch with him.

**We will notice those who give from their scarcity, challenging us to offer our abundance to those in need.**

The Spirit clothes us with grace.

**We will go forth to welcome all we meet into our hearts.**