

It's tough being a woman in a world where all the systems have been created to benefit men. I am talking about more than a cultural bias that looks to men to be the leaders, but it also ascribes to them wisdom and skill as well.

It's not just about fewer opportunities for women, it's about closing off whole portions of our shared lives: jobs are closed to women and self-expression is denied, and others want to control a woman's body.

These are systems which count women as trophies, as one more head of cattle and as baby making machines. This is more than a lack of status or financial security or even having a voice at the table.

Now imagine how hard it would be to be a widow: with no voice in a court of law, no standing in the community, no source of income, no identity of her own and no options. Life stretches out before the widow as one long struggle against all the odds.

So before we begin to interpret this familiar story, before we draw conclusions about who is stingy and who is generous,

before we start painting the characters with a brush of noble sacrifice, making some heroes and others villains

or make this into some kind of message about increasing your giving or giving it all to Jesus – when we all know that none of us are going to do that.....

Let's try to grasp the larger picture – not just of the area around the temple tax box, but of a loud, busy world that revolves around honor and money and men! And oh how those men love their honor, with fancy titles and symbols of their status, commanding the best seats and the first place in line.

Let's picture this scene and listen for the sound of two copper coins, then take a moment to notice the widow so easily overlooked. There in the crowd is the anonymous widow, swept along and swallowed up by systems which render her powerless: a religious system, a governing system and a cultural system.

Today is a story about a widow: the very definition of powerless vulnerability in Jesus' time – a woman at the mercy of every man in power. We are coming to the climax of the Jesus story where all the final words need to be spoken, all the final lessons taught, all the truths brought into clarity.

We have arrived at the moment where two copper coins are slipped into the tithing box: **two coins which are either worthless**

OR an offering of priceless worth.

Either it's a foolish act by a woman with no money sense OR it's the final act of a vulnerable person at the end of their rope.

She gave what she needed to live on – gave it all – unnoticed by anyone but Jesus. But then Jesus had radar for just these kind of people – people on the bottom, overlooked, powerless.

They were hungry, scrambling to pay the required taxes, scratching out a living from poor soil and too little rain. They had no seat at any table, no voice in decisions, few options from day to day.

The systems that work for others don't work for them; they were the people no one wanted to show up for a Sunday pot luck or a Christmas Eve service. They are still among us.

These are the Jesus people.

This widow was one of them – the people Jesus searches for and reaches out to, the people who have been crushed by the systems of the world, and are invited by Jesus into a new way of living, a system saturated in love.

Jesus looked for the pain, the despair. Jesus looked for those desperate for hope.

Then he walked with them to show them a different way of living, of being with one another; he showed them the power of love which builds community, love which forgives and is life giving, love that does not keep track of wrongdoing. He died for them and then left the tomb behind.

What could Jesus say to this anonymous widow who might well have eaten her last bit of food, and would soon meet her Creator? Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden? Come and know hope.
Come and know your Creator.

What do we say to those whose pain follows them wherever they go? Are we able to sit with the ones for whom there are no answers, for whom you have no advice, no way to 'fix it'?

Are we able to walk with the ones on the wrong end of a system which has no place for them, has pressed them to the margins and counted as worthless? What are we offering to these folk?

Has the love of God for us in Jesus transformed us so that we are able to offer that same love to these Jesus people? Can we forgive their disasters and bad habits and ignore their tattoos and salty language? Can we allow them to love whomever they love? **Is the love of God in us big enough to do that?**

Can we sit with them – both friends and strangers - over a cup of coffee or maybe on the park bench or at the local diner and offer what Jesus offers? Will we pray for them and weep with them? Are we able to just love them and not keep trying to fix them?

Can we receive their offering of two copper coins, a pittance in the eyes of this world but salvation in the kingdom of Jesus – with joy and thanksgiving? Will we recognize the widow who gives it all?

This is our work as people of God. Not the liturgies or hymns, not poinsettias or even preachers, not buildings or programs but bringing the hope that is Jesus to the folk everywhere who need it, the hope to which we cling when the darkness covers our lives.

As we begin to prepare for the coming of the Christ child, let us be on the lookout for an anonymous widow, and be prepared to be Christ to her.