

**May I never boast...
except...
in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**

Date: 07 November 2021
Service/s: *Across the Diocese*
Series: Questioning Jesus
Title: Flashy or humble?
Passage: Mark 12.38-44

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- You may recall me saying back during our 'Give me 15 minutes' series, that Jesus' harshest words were reserved for the religious leaders of the day.
 - He calls them out on the **grandstanding**; their **hypocrisy**; the **law keeping** they want to burden people with... and for doing religious things merely for **show**!
 - In the section of Mark we've been looking at, its these people we've seen trying to **trap** Jesus with their **words**... and **question** Jesus **time and again** to see if they can **trip him up**...
 - Eventually he **silences** them – 12:34 - no one dares to ask him any more questions...
 - ...and as he **continues** to teach the wider **crowds** – v37 – *they listened to him with delight.* //
 - In the chapter which follows our passage today – ch13 - as Jesus teaches regarding Jerusalem coming under attack and the temple being destroyed, he will be showing the religious leaders how their **whole religious system is about to collapse**... hope you'll be back for the next two weeks as we unpack that chapter...
 - ...but **before** we get there... the evangelist **Mark** in his **gospel** wants to do two important things...
 - He wants to **contrast** the public **flashy-ness** of the teachers of the **law**...
 - ...with the **astonishing quiet humility** of a **poor widow**.
 - So my two points – straight from the title of today's message...

1. **Flashy?**
2. **Humble**

So

1. FLASHY

- Jesus here is warning the large crowd who were listening to him with delight – **against** their **own religious leaders**...
- Can you **imagine**?
- You have to allow this to sink in...
- Let's look again at the actual verses – v38 – *Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets.*
- That's a **long list** of **assertions**. You may like to read **Matthew 23** for a longer list!
- Let's have a quick look?
- **Walk around in flowing robes** – the inference is that they loved the robes because they made them feel **important**... significant... the robes drew people's **attention** to them... they stood **out**... they commanded people's **respect**... //

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- **Be greeted with respect in the marketplaces** – probably as people bowed or nodded or tipped their hat – “**Rabbi**”... again – they felt **important**... oh the pride in their **position** – and in all they had achieved to **get** to this **pace** rising **up** within **them**. //
- **Have the most important seats in the synagogues** and **the places of honour at banquets** – imagine their delight as they were shown to the **top table**... and then their **every whim** and **wish** being **catered** for... **loving** the **attention** / the **acclaim**... perhaps even thinking – they **earned** this – they **deserved** it...
- Then in v40 – perhaps a little **more serious** – and **sobering** – *they devour widows’ houses*
- They **devour widows’ houses**? presumably – taking **possession** of the **homes** of widows somehow and making them their **own**
- So the very people they are meant to **protect** – they are **ripping** off...
- **James** – remember – Jesus’ brother - says in his Epistle ch 1 - *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress – look after widows...* //
- ...but here are the teachers of the law **devouring** their **homes**...
- Again - Paul describes Christians who have a form of godliness but deny its power – saying – 2 Timothy 3 - They.... *worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women!*
- This is just **awful**... and Jesus is saying this is what the **teachers of the law** do... so – **watch out for them!** //
- And the final issue he has with the teachers of the law – v40 – he says they *for a show make lengthy prayers*.
- **Lengthy** prayers – not because of their great **trust** – and their deep **prayerfulness** – NO – for a **show**! All for **show**!! Again – for **recognition** – **attention** – **praise** – “oh **such great prayers**”!!
- And then comes the **punchline** – at the end of v40 – **these men will be punished most severely**.
- They will be held **accountable** for their **showy grandstanding** – for their obvious **hypocrisy** – for the way they rip off **widows**...
- their attitude breaks **Jesus’ heart**...
- because they are on about **themselves**
- they’re using their position of power to rip off the most **vulnerable**...
- their **religious life** is all about **them**... //
- I think there are two points of application – one is to ALL of us – that **we** don’t do anything in terms of our relationship with God to draw attention to **ourselves**...
- it was only a few weeks back when we saw that the way to **greatness** is not to point to yourself and tell people how **great** you are – but to take the form of a **servant**... after the pattern of Jesus **himself**...
- and the **second** point of application – is to the likes of **me** – and other **clergy** - and I want to tread carefully here...
- ...but as this was address specifically to the teachers of the law...
- ...is there a particular application today’s equivalent - to bishops and clergy here?
- Would Jesus say to people today – **watch out for those bishops and clergy** – they like to talk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect when they walk down the street... they love to be sat in

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special places at community events and honoured at parties... some – some – have used their position to gain **access to** and abuse **children** – and all for **show** – make **lengthy prayers**... ///

- watch out...these will be punished most severely.... //
- Tragic... **shameful**...
- To use a position that it meant to point others to the **glory of God and Christ Jesus** – and use it **instead** to **draw people** to **yourself** and exploit the most **vulnerable**... /////
- Fascinating – that there's a **widow** in the second part of the passage
- And while the teachers of the law are busy **ripping off** widows, this widow now serves as a **rebuke** to those who would **rip off widows**... /
- what an **astonishing** and **profound contrast** in the **second part** of the **passage**.

2. HUMBLE?

- Have a look with me at v41 - *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. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.*
- Jesus has widened out his **criticism here**... from the '**teachers of the law**' to '**many rich people**'
- And the clear **inference** is that these people **too** where **giving** for **show**...
- **Rich people** – throwing in **large amounts**... to be **SEEN** to be throwing in **large amounts**... //
- Do you recall the way Jesus exhorted people to **give** in the sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6?
- *when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*
- It's not meant to be **flashy**
- Not meant to be so other people **see** how much you put in... /////
- Then along comes this **poor widow**...
- She's not giving to be **seen** that's for sure...!
- She is a **widow** – so **very little** means of **income** or **financial support**... very little **money** at her **disposal**...
- And she puts in **two very small copper coins** – worth only a **few cents**...
- It's not **flashy** /
- Its astonishingly **beautiful** and **humble** /
- ...especially as Jesus explains just to his disciples who he calls to him – hey guys – see this lady - *this poor widow has put **more** into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their **wealth**; but she, out of her **poverty**, put in **everything**—all she had to live on."* //
- And we think – hang on Jesus – **what** are you **saying**...?
- ...that she put in **more** than all **others**... do you mean Jesus – more than any other **individual** or more than all the others **combined**?
- It's **ambiguous** isn't it – he could mean **either**

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- But **either** way – how is he doing his **calculations**?
- How could **two small coins** be 'more'?//
- On **percentage**. On **percentage**.
- **How much** did she put in?
- **Everything** – all she had to live on – v44 – **100% //**
- She would return home from the temple that afternoon and have nothing **left**.
- **Everyone** else – throwing in **large amounts** – they could come back and do it all **again tomorrow...** hardly made a **dent** on their **bank balance** – **zero impact** on their **investment portfolio**!
- **They** would be heading from for **dinner** – thank you very much.
- If the **first** part of the contrast drives us to **despair** as we feel the force of what Jesus is saying about **these hypocrites...** and as see people **like** them **today...//**
- ...this **second** part warms our heart and **lifts our spirits...**
- ...as we think of this **generous, humble, lovely lady....** Literally giving her **last pennies...** not even realising for a **moment** – that **Jesus** – the **Saviour of the World** was **watching...** we not only see **HER** heart.. but something of the beautiful **heart of Jesus** as he responds with **generous praise** as he tells his disciples **about her**.

RECAP

Flashy or humble?

Which reality reflects **you** and what **you're** on **about**?

Are you like the teachers of the law... wanting to draw attention to **yourself** – even in the life of the **church...**?

...revelling in the **respect** – relishing the honour you're shown... //

Giving so that people see how **generous** you are...

Perhaps using your position to your own **advantage** that you might **exploit** the **vulnerable**?

Even if there's a **tiny** bit of truth to that – we must **repent** –... and walk away from **anything** whereby we try draw **attention** to **ourselves...** !!

OR

Do you more accurately reflect the widow?

No need for recognition at **all...** ! /

Just going about your work **tirelessly** without **thanks** – perhaps without anyone else even **knowing** what you're **doing...**

Going **without** – a generosity that actually **means** something... **costs** something... meaning you'll actually **go without** – because of the way you've given yourself to the **Lord's work...** ///

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One way will in the end – only bring **condemnation**

The other – **commendation....**

Flashy?

Or

Humble?

The sad reality is that we can be a sad mix of both...

Or flashy one day and humble the next....

We are deeply flawed...

And that is why again and again we go back to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and his mighty resurrection...
and remind ourselves what this is all about...

...we humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God – that he might lift us up...

NEXT week – Ch 13:1-11 – Kevin Simington...