

**November 14th 2021, Mark Chapter 12 verses 38 to 44 – Menai-Illawong.**

Welcome to worship.

*“When you are harvesting your field and overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olive from your trees, do not go over the branch a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien the fatherless and the widow. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. This is why I command you to do this. ” (Deuteronomy Chapter 25 verses 19 to 22 NIV).*

**Prayer.**

Gracious God we thank you for your generosity in life. You shower blessing upon blessing every day. Your heart is one of love who gives far more than we deserve. As our provider, sustainer and hope for our future needs; we worship and praise your great name.

Lord your desire is that none miss out in life but are fed, cared for and valued. Help us Lord to live in this light to share our harvest with you and those in need. We see your son Jesus born in poverty so that everyone can see your goodness and love for them. Lord may our worship but not just words but what we give to those in need. Amen.

**Song:** Let Everything that has Breath <https://youtu.be/0m378TGODSA>

**Church Today.**

Welcome to everyone here at church and on zoom. It's great to be back together. We can't sing and for now no morning tea – but we are together and it's great to share together. We expect this way of church to last until December sometime when further easing of restrictions are expected.

Our reading from Mark's gospel today has Jesus in Jerusalem and speaking up about widow's estates and how the Temple authorities have robbed these widows of their livelihood. Not all scribes were like this as we know from last Sunday, but it appears from other sources that widows suffered when life was hard for everyone. In our bible reading today Jesus comments on a widow putting all that she had into the offering plate. Is the reference of Jesus one of extreme generosity or is Jesus having a go at those who take advantage of the widows? Caring for these widows is important to God.

## **Bible readings for today.**

1 Kings Chapter 17 verses 8 to 16, Psalm 146, Mark Chapter 12 verses 38 to 44 and Hebrews Chapter 9 verses 24 to 28.

## **Mission and Planning Report.**

Meetings are finished regarding the mission and planning report. A report will be prepared by church council for the congregation to consider.

**Scripture in schools** is back for most schools this week.

**Reading** –Psalm 146.

## **Kid's church.**

It's been a long time since we have been at church and studied the bible together. What a brave and loving girl this servant was. She could have been so angry about losing her family. But she was kind and helpful to her master and wanted him to get better.

That's the way to live with God and Jesus. Be kind, not nasty, forgive not strike back, share not keep to yourself. This is the way of Jesus.

- Someone drops their shopping bag and food goes all over the place – help pick up.
- Why not give some of your work you do at church to someone in the church and say – this is for you. Naaman learns to obey God.

We have some puzzles and colouring in pages for you to do.

For any older kids I want you today to try to remember this story by writing extra words besides the ones I have given you.

For example:

Important – Naaman was the important soldier general.

Enemy – Naaman was an enemy of Israel and the servant girl.

Prayer.

Lord Jesus help us to be kind to everyone to please Jesus. Amen.

**Song** Hallelujah (Your Love Is Amazing)

[https://youtu.be/wJK0RW\\_3Vm8](https://youtu.be/wJK0RW_3Vm8) (Kids singing).

**Reading** Mark Chapter 12 verses 38 to 44.

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One of the key phrases we have been hearing during covid is the words “**essential services**”. It was considered at the peak of the virus that essential services were things like shopping, medical needs, exercise and essential jobs so that everyone could survive during lockdown.

That essential services included things like alcohol shops surprised and disappointed some of us.

What are some other essential services? We have our cars, we need electricity and water, we have to have a mobile phone these days, a TV, having access to our money, etc?

Here’s a question – is giving money to Jesus an essential service?

Our reading this week from Mark’s gospel concerns the estate of widows and giving money at the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus is in the Temple courts in Jerusalem, not in the sanctuary area; but in the wider halls where fellowship and sharing and teaching took place.

Jesus has just said some very strong words about scribes or teachers of the Law who like to look impressive and like be honoured and who are very nasty towards widows. Jesus says they devour widow’s houses or estates. Without men in their lives it was very hard for women and where they may have been left property and been asset rich – they still needed to eat. It’s hard to believe this kind of abuse could happen, but then 2000 years later we see the elderly being attacked at their homes and taken advantage of financially by family members. People like me who are ministers had much more power and influence in the Temple 2000 years ago. It seems they had authority, not just in spiritual matters but with estates and division of money.

Jesus is looking at various people placing money in the Temple treasury or offering plate. This money was for the upkeep of the Temple establishment and the salaries of the Priests and as we will see soon – for the care of the widows.

I don't understand how it all worked in detail in a time when they were occupied by Rome and paid taxes to them as well, but it appears the Priests and scribes in Jerusalem were responsible also for legal matters to do estates and the poor. The fact that many of the poor lived in Jerusalem and cities like they do today and relied on the Temple for food could have meant that they took over their property if they had them as well.

What does it mean when Jesus says of scribes that ***“they devour the estates or houses of the widows?”*** Obviously not referring to the scribe we considered last week who considered loving his neighbor as very important.

There are 6 possible ways this abuse towards widows has been understood:

1. Payments for legal assistance were given to the scribes that took all the widows savings even though this was not allowed.
2. Payments for scribes for acting on their wills when their husband died.
3. Taking advantage of their hospitality.
4. When the scribes miss-managed the estates of widows for personal gain.
5. Payments for spiritual gain like assurances of forgiveness that drained their resources.
6. Putting up houses for debts that could not be re-paid and so had to be surrendered.

The interesting and somewhat perplexing question is does the reference of Jesus to scribes devouring widows estates have any relation to the poor widow putting in everything she had in the next section. Most believe it does.

Many commentators have understood that Jesus was praising this widow for her generous giving – of giving all she had in contrast to the rich who give a large portion of what they have – but still had plenty left to live on.

I have preached many a sermon on this passage like that over the years and it is a possibility that this is what Jesus is referring to. We want to give generously and sacrificially. Some people today think giving 10% of your income or tithing to God is very generous? It's not. We can spend that on an overseas holiday or golf expenses for the year.

The other possibility is Jesus is referring to this gift or offering as a lament, as a protest that this widow felt she had to give this much in order to get the help she needed to live and survive.

When we turn to the Old Testament it is clear that the poor and widow were afforded special protection by God, including at the Temple. Here are a few passages from Deuteronomy to illustrate this:

Chapter 10:18 – The Lord defends the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving them food and clothing.

Chapter 14 :29 – every 3 years bring your 10% of the harvest so that the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.”

Deuteronomy Chapter 24 verses 19 – 22. Verses about leaving some crops in your fields for the widow, the fatherless and alien.

Deuteronomy Chapter 26 verses 12 to 18. – Verses again about setting aside – 10% of your produce every 3<sup>rd</sup> year for the fatherless, the widow and alien.

One thing is clear – when Jesus says these scribes devour the widow’s estates or houses – they are not fulfilling this sacred command to care for the widows who were often poor.

So rather than being a story about the generosity of this widow; it is an example of how the widows have scraped to the bottom of the barrel in terms of giving so that their needs are met at the Temple. They now depended fully upon the Temple because all their assets had been taken. We all have heard today of sects - who require people to hand over all their money –it’s wrong.

We may think Jesus had no right to comment on people’s giving of money thinking it is a personal matter between us and God. But money is never a personal matter with God. Jesus speaks about money as much as any other topic. It’s about what we do with what we have been given. And giving to God is the best way to spend or give money.

In God’s world we are called by God to give so that God’s word and life may spread across the world and that the church has resources to help people like widows, the poor and those doing it tough. I appeal to us all to make this a strength in a time when we are so well off.

At a local level with our church we have a budget for this. Both individually and as a church we also support other organizations that may interest us or take our hearts. We send money each year to the wider work of the Uniting Church to help there.

Giving money is an **essential service** with Jesus. It is not about giving everything we have because I believe Jesus is taking aim at those who devour widow's estates. But give because you want to see the cause of Jesus grow in the world. In a time when we have so much, few if any of us are like this widow. The best guide to how much to give in scripture is 10% of what you have. But then Jesus comes along and gives his whole life.

There is no end to generosity and maybe the widow along with Jesus is still an example of that. Give generously and let your heart grow towards God and others. Amen.

**Song** I Could Sing Of Your Love Forever [https://youtu.be/u46\\_o40pxKc](https://youtu.be/u46_o40pxKc)

### **Prayers of Intercession.**

- The world seeking to reduce the impact climate change.
- For churches as we begin meeting again and working within the new order.
- For local elections coming up.
- For Christmas and those organisations supporting the widows, the lonely and poor.
- For our youth as they begin meeting this month.
- For scripture teachers starting again this week at some schools.

### **Response.**

Leader - Loving God – let your Spirit flow.

People – May your will be done.

### **Offering Prayer.**

Lord God, we surrender our will to you as well as our love of money. You give us the world and earth to share and care for and so we pray that the offerings we bring today and through our giving will help your way of life to grow in our world. We pray for a wide use of the harvest of our lives and may our first

thought of spending be our offering of thanksgiving to you. May our giving also help us to care for the world you gave us? Amen.

**Bank details for direct depositing.**

*Not for everyone – but if you can we encourage you. Account – Menai-Illawong Uniting Church*

*BSB 634 634 Account number 100019580.*

*If you prefer to give directly; contact Grant and he can arrange to collect the offering from his letterbox.*

**Song:** Our God Saves <https://youtu.be/q6um7z4qvY8>

**Benediction.**

*Now unto Jesus who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before his throne in glory be all power and dominion now and forever. May God the Father bless you and keep you. May the Spirit of God guide to rivers of living water. Amen.*