

## Mission Reflection

for the Season of Pentecost



Seafarers International House

### Scripture

And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living.”<sup>1</sup>

### Message

What is this Gospel really saying?

We may remember it from our days in Sunday School as a shining example of generosity. Around this time of year, we often trot it out as a motivation for the annual stewardship campaigns in our congregations. We venerate, but certainly do not emulate, the widow. She’s not a paradigm of sound financial management.

One commentator has suggested that the Gospel reminds us that “the poor do not represent parasites who drain society of its resources . . . [but rather] that we live in an economy that siphons its resources upward and leaves the vulnerable to face destitution on their own -- and we inhabit churches that ignore the process.”<sup>2</sup>

In the agrarian economy of Jesus’ time, nearly everybody lived in abject poverty, with a handful of wealthy landowners and some enterprising stewards possessing nearly the entire wealth of the world. Even the Pharisees cashed in, exhorting the poor to give to the church. Actually, not a whole lot has changed in the intervening millennia.

Today, most of us can close our eyes to poverty by claiming membership in that ever-elastic socio-economic construct called the middle class. The truth, of course, is that more of us “middle-classers” than we wish to admit are but “one

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Today, most of us can close our eyes to poverty by claiming membership in that ever-elastic socio-economic construct called the middle class. The truth, of course, is that more of us “middle-classers” than we wish to admit are but “one

layoff, one medical crisis, one accident away from joining the ranks of the poor”<sup>3</sup>  
We may know that we’re not rich, but we do not want to associate with the poor.  
So, we are loath to challenge our once agrarian and now capitalist society.

Beware of the scribes, who devour the widow’s houses. Or as another commentator warned, “To what degree do our leaders [or] do we ourselves as leaders serve our own status and glory and to what degree do we serve the purposes of God’s realm?<sup>4</sup> A grander sanctuary? New choir robes? A manicured lawn and a snow-spotless parking lot? Truth be told, fewer of us are spending much time in the church facilities. So, how about devoting some of our resources to welcoming and housing migrants, lest they face destitution?

### Prayer

Lord, you raise up the poor from the dust, and you lift the needy from the ash heap. We seek to be the hands that do your work. Quell our fears, reach into our hearts and encourage us to siphon our resources not upward, but downward to the most vulnerable of your children. Amen

1. Mark 12:38-44

2. Greg Carey, Professor of New Testament, Lancaster Theological Seminary, “The Value of Chump Change”, HUFFINGTON (RELIGION), September 9, 2015, [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com)

3. Ibid

4. Ron Allen, Professor of Preaching and New Testament, Christian Theological Seminary, Commentary on Mark 12:38-44, WORKING PREACHER, LUTHER SEMINARY, March 18, 2012, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)

Postscript: At Seafarers International House, we are adamant about not building monuments to mission, tempting as it may be. We’re perennially short-staffed. Our promotional materials and Internet platforms clearly don’t flow from Madison Avenue. While we just replaced our 50-year-old elevators, our Guesthouse is not the last word in opulence. Seafarers International House just offers care and comfort to seafarers and immigrants. Very quietly. And we hope that in some small way, we serve the purposes of God’s realm. Come visit us and see.

Seafarers International House serves seafarers and immigrants with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It’s available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. “Sleep Well By Doing Good.”

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