

by conflict and our inhumanity to one another .

We confess our share in such a world, our failures to seek and to establish peace even in our own liv6JETc5.

This morning in our service in our reading we remember a particular woman because Jesus singled out for what she did. As is often said of those who fought and gave their lives in wars, we are told that 'she gave everything that she had'.

Living God, fashion and shape us by your Word,
that we might rise from death and destruction to life in all its fullness. Amen.

Mark 12:38-44

Theme: A lost cause?

Sermon structure:

- a) Recap the story which appears straightforward: Jesus watching people putting money in the temple treasury which consisted of 13 large collection boxes. He spies the poor widow – one of the most vulnerable people in his society – and commends for her tiny offering, in comparison with big sums being put in by rich people. She, out of her poverty, gave all that she had'. A story oven-ready for church treasurers promoting stewardship!
- b) Digging deeper...note the context of Mark 12:
 - i) controversies with the religious establishment who are trying to catch him out. Verse 38: 'beware of the scribes...' and then this stinging rebuke: 'they devour widows' houses. Jesus is condemning the entire rotten religious system, centred on the temple, which extorts money out of those least able to afford it. His primary reaction to seeing this woman's action is anger, not joy.
 - ii) These latter chapters of Mark, especially Mark 13, which speak of the immanent destruction of the temple due to the Jews' inability to recognise the things that work for peace – which came true in AD 70 with the destruction of the temple by the Romans (prefigured earlier by Jesus driving the money-changers out of the temple). In other words, not only is this woman being drained of all she had (the sense of the Greek is that she put in 'all the living of her' – in other words, her whole life) but it is in the service of a lost cause: the temple has a very short shelf-life.
- c) On Remembrance Sunday, this passage prompts the question of any war: was it a worth it? Was it justified? Was a costly sacrifice actually a waste, like this woman's sacrifice? E.g.:

the 1st World War, supposedly 'the war to end all wars...' but the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles made that an impossible dream;

2nd World War - arguably easier to justify;

Vietnam war with estimated 58,000 American casualties (apart from Vietnamese). US Defence Secretary at height of the war and a fierce advocate later confessed to deep regrets, saying, ' we were wrong, terribly wrong, and we owe it to future generations to explain why' ;

Northern Ireland? Iraq? Afghanistan? Ukraine? Gaza?

Christians must be honest about where war is a necessity and where it is a waste – like this woman's offering.

- d) This woman could therefore be seen as a symbol of lost causes, of futility and of the futility of war. Yet, for all that, Jesus nevertheless commended her and her act. Jesus saw behind the context which rendered her sacrifice pointless to the spirit of self-sacrifice that motivated it. Maybe he saw in her willingness to 'give all that she had' something of what inspired and drove his own life.

What we see in the woman and in Jesus is that acts of self-giving, even when they even when

that in their trials they may know your love and support.

Most holy and gracious God,
hear our prayers for all who strive for peace and all who fight for justice.
Help us, who today remember the cost of war to work for a better tomorrow;
and as we commend to you lives lost in terror and conflict,
bring us all, in the end, to the peace of your presence;