

“The Glorious Tale of Nobody.” Mark 12:41-44

“And Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small 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 offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

She got it. She absolutely got it. What did she get? She got what we all long for, what we all dream about throughout our lives. You may wonder who am I talking about? Yes, I am talking about the poor widow of whom we heard in our Gospel reading.

And what do I mean, when I say that she got it? There are those shared universal experiences, yearnings of our hearts. We want our lives to have mattered. We want our lives to have a purpose. We want to have made a difference, to have significance.

For just consider – what if the opposite is the case? You and your life didn’t matter. There was no purpose for it. No significance, it didn’t make any difference. Very sad. No one dreams about that. But how does this apply to the account of the poor widow?

As Mark had recorded this for us, she already had lost her husband. Besides, she was very poor, and now she gave away the last thing that she had. Two little coins. In some English translations they are called “mites”. Two mites. [That is, by the way, where we got the name for this Sunday, from the widow’s faithful gift.]

The act of giving wasn’t too impressive. The setting was quite ordinary. The donation itself was close to nothing. Yes, that is all true, but... she had something that our generous Father wants to give to each one of you.

The poor widow fully trusted God. She was giving herself to Him with everything she was and everything she had. “Take me, Lord, I am yours! Use me as you find it fitting! I am yours.” And that is exactly what Jesus did.

He took her gift of gratitude, her trust, her devotion, her sacrifice of self and used her to accomplish something amazing. We don’t know her name, we don’t know where she came from, or where she went, or what happened to her afterwards.

We know nothing about her. But because of her undivided trust in her God, and because Jesus drew our attention to her, for almost two millennia the Triune God has used this poor widow to inspire millions of Christians around the world and He continues doing it. And think about the next step - about the countless blessings that

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have been shared and passed on to others through those who were inspired by this poor widow. Amazing! She was like nobody in that story, and yet, we can call this account - the glorious tale of nobody! Just consider how much her life mattered, what a difference she has made, how significant her contribution was, is and will be to the lives of millions. Because she offered herself and Jesus blessed her offering.

This whole situation is so counter-intuitive, so contrary to what appears to make sense to us. We all long for our lives to matter, to make that difference, but more often than not we try to satisfy those deep longings by trying to make a name for ourselves.

We are afraid to surrender to this God, to lose control, to not achieve what we believe will make us into someone special. We don't really trust this God. We certainly are hesitant to trust Him with everything. What if He messes things up? What if we don't like the direction, where He wants to take our lives? What then?!

We feel we are safer trusting our own "infinite" wisdom. And the more we focus on ourselves, the less there is in us, regardless of what worldly fame, or towers, or monuments or whatever we build to elevate ourselves. But the more we surrender to Jesus, the more we trust Him and allow Him to use us as He finds it fitting, the more He can accomplish through us in ways we couldn't even dream about.

And those ways that He may choose to use us will be different for each one of us. Because our God has made us all so different. He will not use all of us the same way. He has placed us in different situations and different vocations; He has given us different talents and different opportunities.

What He is looking for is - your heart. Your trust in Him. Your faithfulness. Your gratitude. Your desire to be used by Him to glorify Him and His name, and not to make a name for ourselves, as is so common in this world.

Let me tell you a story about another widow and about an ordinary Christian man whom we are blessed to have met and how the good Lord used and is still using them. Let's call them for the sake of the story – Jeanette and Merv. Jeanette had experienced God's transforming grace and presence as her husband for a few years was battling a very aggressive form of cancer.

As she was looking for ways to express her gratitude to Jesus, our Lord used her to bring this man, Merv, into His fold. A family friend who had experienced life-beating way more than an average person, responded to her invitation to see what Jesus has to offer. The Gospel of God's grace changed Merv, his heart and his life.

Overwhelmed and grateful for God's grace they both were offering themselves to the Lord. With all they were and all they had. And Jesus used their offering. One day, by divine arrangement, they met a pastor from Kenya, from the Lutheran School of Theology. They learned that many Christians in Africa only seldom can experience the

blessings of the Holy Communion, the reason being that wine was very expensive. During that meeting, a vision was born. What if the School of Theology planted their own vineyard? What if they taught their students how to grow vines and make wine? What if their students brought back to their congregations a few cuttings from that vineyard and planted their own vineyards, and grew their own grapes and made their own wine? What a blessing and joy it would be to those congregations?!

So, these two ordinary Christians, Jeanette and Merv said: “We will help! That is where we have our know-how – vineyards and winemaking.” They did their research; they managed to gather whatever was needed to get that vineyard vision rolling.

They shipped what was needed from Australia to Kenya. Then Merv went to Kenya, prepared everything and planted that vineyard and taught the locals at the School of Lutheran Theology how to care for it. A few years ago, that vineyard, which just happens to be nick-named “Grace’s vineyard”, produced a rich first crop.

And the truth to be told, that first crop was so good that... students and the faculty members just ate it all and didn’t make any wine. But now... a few more years along the road, that initial vision is becoming reality.

Jeanette and Merv. Two ordinary Christians. With hearts that trusted in Jesus and wanted to express their gratitude for everything He had done for them, giving themselves into His service: “Take, Lord, use us as you find it fitting!” Similarly, as with the poor widow, we can praise the Lord for another glorious tale.

The Lord took their offering, their hearts, their talents and put them to good use. How many have already been blessed by their gift of gratitude! How many will be blessed as students year after year will carry cuttings from that vineyard to their congregations, and where fellow saints will rejoice celebrating the most holy Supper of our Lord for years and decades to come?!

How many will be blessed through hearing what the Lord did through them, this tale of ordinary Christians, who trusted Jesus and wanted to express their gratitude. They didn’t want to make a name for themselves.

Almost no one in those many congregations in different corners of Africa will know who is to be thanked for that wonderful wine they are blessed to enjoy at the Lord’s table. No worldly glory, just hearts given to Jesus as living sacrifices.

What a glorious tale! What a difference they have made! How meaningful their service has been! And that is just one episode from their lives... Isn’t that what we long for in our hearts? To be able to bless so many and to change the lives of so many? And it may seem paradoxical, but it is exactly when we surrender ourselves with all that we have and all that we are to our Creator and Redeemer, that is when He can use us to

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do truly amazing things through us. Mark's account about that poor widow, the story about Jeanette and Merv, those two ordinary Christians, those are stories... about you. Yes, about you! About how the Lord Jesus uses ordinary people, often nobodies in the eyes of this world, to bring forth extraordinary blessings and make their lives an extraordinary inspiration for others.

I am convinced that our Lord Jesus could tell similar stories about each one of you. For that is His Spirit in you that performs these ordinary and glorious feats. That is Him who takes our humble gifts, our little mites and turns them into abundance of blessings. This is how your God desires to bless you.

There may be relationships and situations where you recognize that the good Lord has worked through you to do something you couldn't. And there are relationships and situations where you have simply trusted your Lord, and faithfully followed Him, and allowed Him to use you to bless others, where you have no idea about the magnitude and the reach of what He has done through you.

A faithful service in your vocations, faithfulness in marriage, raising children in faith, a word of comfort or encouragement spoken to someone when they were at their lowest, the gift of your time you gave them, an invitation to the Service, a simple confession of your Christian faith, generosity in giving to a neighbor in need or for the cause of the Gospel, or any other expression of ordinary Christian life.

Our Lord wants to bless you, He wants to make your lives beautiful and rich with meaning, He wants to use you to make the difference; if only we allow Him, if only we entrust ourselves to Him: "Here I am, Lord, use me, use me with everything that you have given to me!"

What an amazing life our Lord desires for us. What countless opportunities to be used by Him He has placed before us. If only we are willing to see them as blessings and to offer ourselves to Jesus. And it doesn't matter who you are, you may be just like that widow, or like those two ordinary saints, you may be not much more than nobodies in the eyes of this world.

It doesn't matter to the One who is famous for creating from nothing. Your Lord has already been using you and is using you. I just pray that may He bless you with His Spirit even more abundantly, may He help you to trust Him with everything you are and everything you have.

May He use the testimonies of the poor widow and of other saints to encourage you, may He grant you the eyes enlightened by His Spirit to see the opportunities where He could use you to bless you and through you many others.

And one day may it be your story that is told to inspire others as one more glorious tale of an ordinary nobody. May it happen to all of you! Amen.