

Sunday 20 September 2026
The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: 2 Kings 4.1-7

NT: 2 Corinthians 8. 8-13

Gp: Luke 20:45- 21:4

Here at Liverpool Parish Church, set in the heart of the city with the waterfront, offices, shops, visitors and those in real need all around us, we know something about public generosity and hidden generosity. We see the big appeals, the civic campaigns, the charity events, the names on plaques and buildings, and we give thanks for them. But we also know the quieter gifts that sustain the life of this church and city: a bag added to a foodbank collection, a few coins given by someone who has counted every penny, a parishioner giving faithfully with no fuss and no audience, a neighbour noticing need before anyone else does. If we were asked which gift mattered more, most of us would instinctively look at the amount. Jesus looks somewhere else. He looks at the life behind the gift.

The danger with a familiar passage is that familiarity can blunt its edge. We may hear the story and reduce it to something comforting: "It does not matter how small my gift is, so long as my heart is in the right place." There is truth there. God does not value gifts as the world values them. But if that is all we hear, then we have made the story smaller than Jesus made it.

This is not a sentimental tale about a poor woman doing her best. It is a searching word about money, worship, justice, trust, and the kind of discipleship that touches our lives. Luke wants us to read this story in context. Immediately before it, Jesus warns his hearers about the scribes: religious experts who love long robes, greetings in the marketplace, the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets. Then comes the devastating phrase: they "devour widows' houses". Those charged with teaching God's law to God's people are exploiting the very people God's law commands them to protect.

So, when Jesus looks up and sees the rich putting their gifts into the treasury and then sees this needy widow putting in her two small coins, he is not simply comparing large gifts and small gifts. He is revealing the moral and spiritual world behind the gifts. On one side are the rich, whose offerings are visible, impressive, and religiously respectable. On the other is a widow, vulnerable and poor, whose gift would barely make a sound. Yet Jesus sees. He sees the gift, and he sees the heart from which it comes.

That seeing matters. Giving in the Temple was not entirely private. There were chests or trumpet-shaped receptacles into which metal coins were placed. Large gifts announced themselves. A wealthy person's offering could be seen and heard. The widow's two lepta — the smallest of coins — could easily disappear unnoticed. But not to Jesus. He notices what others overlook. He measures differently. The world measures the amount. Jesus measures the cost, the trust, the surrender, the love.

"Truly I tell you," says Jesus, "this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on." That last phrase is the heart of the passage. She gave "all the

life that she had". Her gift was not large in market value, but it was immense in spiritual weight. It touched her life. It required trust. It revealed a heart that had not been captured by money.

And that is the challenge for us. The test of generous discipleship is not simply the amount we give, but whether our giving touches our lives. If our giving were returned to us at the end of the month, would it make any material difference to how we live? Does our giving require obedience? Does it ask us to trust God? Does it loosen the hold of money upon us? Gifts from abundance may be good and necessary, but they may also leave us unchanged. The widow's gift is different. It is a gift of life.

This does not mean that Jesus commands every poor person to give away what they need to live. Scripture does not despise prudence, nor does the Gospel permit the church to manipulate the vulnerable. The story is not a fundraising technique. It is not permission for religious institutions to extract from those already under pressure. Indeed, the passage itself stands beside Jesus' condemnation of those who devour widows' houses. The church must never praise the widow while behaving like the scribes.

Our Old Testament reading from 2 Kings reminds us that God sees the need of the widow. A woman is in debt; her children are at risk; the future appears closed. Through Elisha, God provides oil in abundance, not as spectacle but as mercy. The empty jars are filled. The debt is paid. Life is restored. The God who receives the widow's offering in Luke is the same God who provides for the widow in 2 Kings. Generosity begins not with our heroic effort, but with God's generous provision.

And Paul, writing to the Corinthians, gives us the shape of Christian giving: "I do not say this as a command," he says, but as an invitation to test the genuineness of love. The goal is not that some are burdened while others are eased, but that there may be a fair balance. Christian generosity is not guilt-driven. It is grace shaped. It flows from Christ, who though he was rich, became poor for our sake. We give because we have received. We share because everything is gift.

So perhaps we need a simple way to remember the path of generous discipleship: Gift, Gratitude, Grace and Generosity. First, gift: all that we have is received from God. Then gratitude: we recognise the giver and are set free from possessiveness. Then grace: we discover that God's generosity to us in Christ is deeper than calculation or duty. And then generosity: our lives, including our money, begin to move outward in worship, justice and love.

This means that generous discipleship cannot be reduced to a private decision between me and God. Of course giving is personal; it reveals the heart. But personal does not mean private in the sense of being beyond challenge, beyond teaching, beyond the claims of the Body of Christ. The Gospel calls us not only to give something, but to become generous people. That touches our spending and our saving, our investments and our leisure, our employment and our business practices, the poor we notice and the injustices we would rather not see.

The widow's gift is therefore both personal piety and prophetic challenge. It is worship offered to God; it is also judgement on comfortable religion that looks generous but

costs little. It asks the wealthy — and in global terms many of us are wealthy — whether our hearts are being trained by grace or held captive by abundance. It asks the church whether we honour the poor not only in words but in justice. It asks each of us whether our giving is an act of trust or merely the disposal of surplus.

St Augustine once prayed, “Teach us, O Lord, this difficult lesson: to manage conscientiously the goods we possess, and not covetously desire more than you give to us.” That is a good prayer for this Gospel. For riches are not evil in themselves, but the love of riches can make us fearful, grasping, careless, and unjust. The widow teaches us another way: open-handed trust before God.

May God give us eyes to see as Jesus sees: not the noise of the gift, but the heart of the giver; not the appearance of righteousness, but the truth of love. May he free us from the fear that clings to money, and form in us the generous life of Christ. And may our gifts, great or small, become signs of gratitude, acts of justice, and offerings of worship to the God who has first given everything to us.

Fr Bill Addy