

Sermon on Sunday 19th March 2017
Hannover International Worship Petri church

Text: Mark 12, 41 - 44

Pastor Dr Uta Blohm

Today I am thinking of someone in his eighties coming to church this morning. Attending church is something he has done on and off since he is childhood. He finds it harder these days though - since his wife had died.

What a strange thing to do to? He is thinking: going to church on Sundays, singing, praying, listening. It had occurred to him before - not for the first time in his life - he is wondering why he is here.

Nothing much has changed since he first started. No, that is not true. He is thinking. A lot has changed. The prayers are different. New hymns were written in the seventies and eighties. Some seem already more dated than the old ones. Church members of all ages say prayers, read, take over bits of the service. Sometimes the order of service is changed to a degree he finds slightly annoying. He feels a bit embarrassed admitting that to himself.

That may well be an age thing. Sometimes he is dreaming of the good old days. Those idealised days of his youth when life lay still ahead of him. When he had argued about God and the world. Young people these days are simply not as an engaged as we were. Well, he knows that is not true.

He is smiling to himself. He finds himself being jealous - wishing he was young again.

Despite all the changes church still feels the same. The whole set up feels always slightly improvised in this day and age when it is possible access perfect performances on your phone. No, he refuses to want the olden days back. It is actually good one does not have to go to a library simply to get a bit information on something one is interested in. He remembers the days when dictionary articles were dated by the time they were printed.

What about the Bible readings - are they dated? Written long before there was even a printing press. Passed on over the generations. Often far too familiar.

Hang on a minute. This is interesting.

He starts listening to the reading. It talks about, well the collection in the ancient temple - if that is the right word to use.

Some things never change. 'It takes a lot to keep the show on the road', the deceased rabbi Lionel Blue once observed. It takes a lot to keep religious buildings, churches, synagogues open. It requires a lot of effort to prepare services, to attract people. And money is needed. Back then as well today.

The temple and the worship including sacrifices was kept up through the contributions from members of the community, in particular wealthy members. The role money play is often not acknowledged but not so in the Bible.

Jesus takes the time to observe what worshippers are doing.

„I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on.“ That is the observations Jesus makes. The woman gave only two very small copper coins. It was all she had.

She gave everything and nobody can take that away from her. True. Our man knows this. He can somehow identify with the wealthy members of community. Well maybe not quite - certainly not when he was younger - but nowadays yes. And he gives generously, well not always. Thinking about it - he gave probably more when he had less.

But this woman has given all she had. Only very few people will be able to do what she has done. He would never be able to do that. He does understand, yes has learnt through pain, that there is very little in life that can be taken for granted. No relationship, no marriage, no career, no political Union. Everything requires effort and constant care.

She gave all she had.

And no one can take that away from her. It reminds him of one of his students who found studying a lot harder than most of the others. Some people would have suggested he should not have gone to university in the first place. But he studied out of interest in the subject area and succeeded. His grades were by no means the best but he loved what he did - and he had given all he could to his studies. So much more than most others who studied half-heartedly.

The student never became a well-known figure in his field but did alright. But he gave all he could. And nobody could take that away from him.

Or the little girls in his son's kindergarten who could not walk but outsmarted them all in her wheelchair. Nobody could take that away from her - and from this woman whose name we don't know.

He is well known in his field. He wanted to be remembered - and yes, that is important when you are building a career. And nobody can take that away from him.

And yet, does it really matter?

It is interesting in the Bible we often find these people whose names are not remembered. Nevertheless they are vital to the story.

The Bible does turn our values upside down. *The last shall be the first.*

Blessed are the poor. This woman only has two copper coins. This not how it should be - he does not believe that. Poverty needs to be abolished. It is about finding meaning in a difficult situation.

She has only two coppers. Nevertheless she is not powerless - and not without choices.

Blessed are those who mourn. He had felt utterly destroyed when his wife had died. But even worse what if he had not been heart broken.

He is reminded of the other reading.

What is it like to be in the desert afraid to die - like the Israelites? That is a reality for many people right now. There may well not be as many refugees as we are told. There is a lot of scaremongering going on.

But people are dying drowning in the Mediterraneans so close to home - and far away in Somalia and elsewhere. Our man feels ashamed of himself having worried for the last couple of months about rising nationalism in Europe...

Somalia is far away. It is human to be more concerned about what happens closer to home.

As a father he is more concerned about his own children than other people's children. Rightly so. Who else is going to worry about them?

Oh, the preacher has stopped preaching. He realises.

What am I doing here in church? Well, I am here because the Bible puts my life into perspective. The readings are a reminder if anything of my humanity.

Looking at the service sheet he is reading: *for the healing of the nations.*

Unfortunately a prayer, which is still needed desperately needed. A prayer for all nations, not just my nation. We all live better when we build bridges - and do not destroy them.

It is the coming together of people from many different backgrounds, which generate new and exciting ideas.

He is reading further: *to a life of love in action.*

Well, he has certainly lived an active life. Has he lived a life of love in action? That is something to think about for later.

He decides to join in the singing.

Let us sing the hymn on the service sheet.

