



The Brokenness of Jesus

TEXT
Luke 21:1–7; 22:14–20

March 13, 2016 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

Jesus took bread and broke it, and said, “This is my body, broken for you.” He gives his life. It took courage.

He does this not because they were ready; not because they were the best and the brightest. He gives his life because it is in the giving that God is present. But still, it took courage.

But before they were at table, Jesus sat opposite the treasury and watched — when all of a sudden, Jesus said, “Do you see that woman?” She has no name, but rather is known simply as a widow who gives all she has to live on.

I don’t know if he was surprised to see her or if he was looking for her — her tiny coins dropping in the treasury box. Had Jesus not pointed her out, I don’t imagine anyone would have noticed. She was invisible. So many people are.

Do you see that woman? What woman? You mean her? No, that widow woman. As Barbara Brown Taylor has said, this woman’s whole life is a “bit part.”¹ She was an extra, used gladly but never really needed. You know people who are that way.

I can’t be sure what caused her to catch his eye, but he wanted to make sure that we see her too. This widow woman captures his attention. Do you see that woman?

Now some students of the text don’t believe Jesus is really pointing to this woman at all. Some think that he is pointing through her to the temple. Just a verse or two before, Jesus says, “Beware of the scribes. . . . They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers.”

He says that, and then immediately he calls attention to this widow. Interpreters say that’s no coincidence. Jesus is pointing to the corruption of the temple. The offerings the wealthy brought — well, Jesus says, it’s not really an offering if it is wealth obtained on the backs of the powerless. God wouldn’t want a gift like that.

Jesus sees the injustice of the temple, the abuse of the weak, and he speaks out against it. The truth is, this woman gave all she had to live on to an institution that is corrupt, an institution that has contributed to her own poverty. Why would Jesus point that out?

Not only that, but the temple to which she gives her of-

fering will not last. The very next words Jesus says are of this temple: “Not a stone will be left upon another.” By the time Luke writes this story, the temple was destroyed.

Why would Jesus want to point out a sacrifice to something like that? Why is he so captivated by this woman?

I think he sees something in her that is just like him. The widow is not unlike Jesus.² I think Jesus sees something of himself in her. He, too, knows what it is to give his whole life to a broken system, a broken people, a broken world.

“This is my body, broken for you,” he said. It took some courage. I wonder if he got that courage because he had already seen this woman. She gives all she has to live on. The Greek literally translates: *She gives all the life she has.*

All the life she has. It sounds a bit like “This is my body, broken for you,” doesn’t it? She gives all of her life to an institution that is not worthy of her gift. The giving grows not from the worthiness of the temple, but from the grace and faith of the woman. It’s what Jesus does as well.

I find it meaningful that Jesus pays attention to this kind

of sacrifice. He knows about sacrifice, and when he sees it, he can't help but respond. Do you see that? Do you see that woman?

Fran gave birth to Jeffery. When he was born, Fran's husband left her. I don't know for sure, but I imagine it was because Jeffery was too much. He was autistic. Fran worked at a Presbyterian Home as an activities director — organizing trips in the fall to see the leaves, and trips to the beauty shop, and exercise that you could do from your chair. The folks at the Presbyterian Home loved Fran, but it was clear to me that the reason she worked was so she could take care of Jeffery.

Jeffery had no speech, but he cruised the church hallways as if at home. He would be the first in line to get a cookie after worship and sometimes would stand there while he ate four or five cookies. He would sometimes crawl under the tables in fellowship hall. He would bounce in the pews and would get up and walk around the sanctuary when he wanted to.

Every day, Fran was there for Jeffery. The money she made went to make sure Jeffery got his medicines and was able to get to special schools. She ate all her meals with Jeffery. Fran never dated; she never went to movies; she never went out, except on Thursday nights for choir practice. She would bring Jeffery. He seemed to enjoy the music.

If you watched, you would see that Fran gave all her life to Jeffery. She did so that he

might know someone loved him; someone would be faithful to him; that in his broken-down world, maybe he would trust that someone saw him.

When it comes to sacrificing anything for that child, Fran will do it. In her lonely world, she knows that those who save their lives will lose it, and those who lose their lives for his sake will save it.

I am confident that Jesus has gathered the angels and said, "Do you see that woman? We are two of a kind, giving our lives because it is the giving that matters. It counts for something. It counts because it is after God's own heart."

Lynn Bartos³ is a nurse in Milwaukee. Nursing is hard work. It is hard on both the body and the mind — but sometimes even more so on the heart. After 44 years, she neared retirement and had this nagging question. She wondered if her decades of nursing mattered. She had given her life to nursing people whose names she could not remember — and who would not remember her. What difference did it make?

Lynn struggled with rheumatoid arthritis and found herself as the receiver of nursing care. Last summer, she was treated by a young nurse named Nicole. Nicole was a good nurse.

Over their visits, Lynn learned that when Nicole was a child, she had a life-threatening intestinal problem. As Nicole shared that story, it hit Lynn. Years earlier, Lynn had been Nicole's nurse. For several

years, she had nursed this little girl through pain and sickness.

Decades later, they are reunited. Nicole has no memory of those childhood days. She was too young. But she will tell you that there has never been a time when she didn't know she needed to be a nurse.

Lynn doesn't wonder if her life of nursing matters anymore. Lynn is lucky. She got to see that she gave her life to something that matters. Not everyone gets that.

He said, "This is my body, broken for you." They didn't really understand in that moment. Because this is the truth: The power of God's love shows up in this broken world every day. And most of the time, nobody sees it.

This is my body broken for you. He gave his life to them — not because they were pure; they weren't. Not because they were the best and the brightest; they weren't. Not because of anything in them, but because of the love that was in him.

We don't see the sacrifices of love like that very often. But that doesn't mean they don't happen. They are there, like with Lynn and my friend Fran. And sometimes with us; we give our lives to something beyond ourselves.

You can probably think of a time when you loved sacrificially like that; a time when you were generous like this, giving your life. And perhaps no one noticed. Perhaps you felt invisible.

It's often that way because this is a broken world. We see

that all the time. But sometimes, I think Jesus looks down and sees his own heart — like treasure in clay jars. And when he does, I am sure that, with great joy, he says to all the angels, “Look, there. Do you see them? They are so much like me. We are two of a kind.”

¹Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (1993), p.127

²Blount & Charles, *Preaching Mark in Two Voices* (2002), p. 203

³The story of Lynn Bartos and Nicole Krahn was seen in “On the Road,” with Steve Hartman, CBS Evening News, March 11, 2016.

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The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s Web site: www.villagepres.org/sermons.