\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Mark 12:38-44*

*As he taught, he said, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.’*

*He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’*

*\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

My three year-old daughter, Hazel Grace, is an expert in imaginative play. It’s her world. And what makes her imagination so boundless is that her mind is a clean slate. Everything is new, wonder abounds, the possibilities for discoveries are endless. I’ve often stood in awe and jealously of her seemingly infinite capacity for imagination. It’s not that us adults are incapable of using our imaginations; it’s that we have a lot more work to do so when compared to the unfettered mind of a child. Unlike children, sometimes we need to *deconstruct* stories, paradigms, and systems that can keep us from reimagining, in our case, what God is saying to God’s church. Reimagining our neighborhood. Reimagining the way we’ve been told things *have* to be.

In order for us to reimagine today’s passage from Mark’s Gospel, there’s some deconstruction to be done. We need to deconstruct a popular interpretation of this passage. It is, for the record, an interpretation that I myself have preached before! And that popular interpretation of this story is that Jesus is praising the act of the impoverished widow, as if her action of giving everything she owned (a pitifully small amount), is to be commended and that we, regardless of our socio-economic status, should “go and do likewise.”

Notice, if you will, that nowhere in the passage does Jesus overtly commend the widow’s actions or suggest that what is happening is “right” or “just.” Like the public reading of all scripture, the tone, tenor, texture, and attitude with which we read the words of Jesus inevitably affect how that word is heard. For example, if I read the passage as such, it sounds as if Jesus is lifting up something commendable: “‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’”

But if I read it another way, we arrive at a vastly different interpretive conclusion: “‘Truly I tell you, this *poor widow* has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her *poverty* has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’” That reading has a note of incredulity and derision. In this reading of the text, Jesus’ commentary is no praise; rather, it’s a lament.

It’s a lament because in the Kingdom of Heaven, there is no such thing as an impoverished widow.

It’s a lament because in the Kingdom of Heaven, someone who doesn’t know where their next meal is coming from isn’t expected to give what little they have to a system designed to help people in their precise situation.

It’s a lament because in the Kingdom of Heaven, there are no systems of oppression that benefit by devouring the livelihoods of the marginalized.

In drawing his disciples’ attention - and ours! - to the actions of the impoverished widow, Jesus isn’t point out what’s “right” with this picture; he’s pointing out what’s broken with it. He’s actively deconstructing his followers’ understanding of what the purpose of the religious system is and how it’s functioning can either usher about the Kingdom of Heaven or hinder its witness and expression.

Today, I want us to see Jesus’ act of lament as an act of reimagining. Reimagining our life together by refusing to accept that the way things are are the way things have to be. Reimagining is an act of turning the impossible into the possible. Jesus sees this impoverished widow and invites his disciples to reimagine a world where she, and all other economically oppressed people, have the support they need to provide for themselves and live their lives free of the burden of poverty.

Some would call such reimagining foolish. Others would call it unrealistic. Still others would label Jesus and his economy of grace something that should stay in the church and not interrupt the patterns of our public and political lives. But all these excuses are attempts to dampen the moral imagination. But our lived experience proves that reimagining the impossible happens all the time.

Those of you who are in your 70’s and 80’s may remember when a president stood before this nation and challenged us to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade. That act of reimagining changed the impossible.

Those of you who are in your 50’s and 60’s may remember when a different president stood in West Berlin and demanded that Mr. Gorbachev tear down a wall. That act of reimagining changed the impossible.

Those of you in your 30’s and 40’s may remember when a black man ran for the office of the presidency and won. That act of reimagining changed the impossible.

And those of you in your teenage years and your 20’s may remember when a woman of color because the first ever of her kind to occupy the Vice Presidency. That act of reimagining changed the impossible.

And most of us, just a few years ago, may remember when a vaccine was developed in record time, safely administered to millions of people, and, as a result, saved countless lives and helped us return to some sense of normalcy. That act of reimagining changed the impossible.

And all of us remember when a stone was rolled over an earthen grave, holding the beloved and broken body of the Son of God, and on the third day was rolled away by the the stubborn and steadfast love of God. That act of reimagining changed the impossible.

So when a poor widow drops two coins in a temple treasury, it's time to get to reimagining; it’s time to change the impossible. Reimagining is a gift Jesus gives to his Church through the Spirit that we may join him in the redemptive work of healing this weary world. It’s a gift that takes practice. It’s a gift that takes the curiosity of a child to yet again see the world where everything is new, wonder abounds, and the possibilities for discoveries are endless.