

“Our Money Story: Reimagine”  
Mark 12:38-44 & Leviticus 19:9-10; 25:8-12

The winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, began her orphanage with a vision. She told her superiors, "I have three pennies and a dream from God to build an orphanage." A dream and three pennies were enough for Mother Teresa to risk everything and to trust God's leading. "Mother Teresa," her superiors chided gently, "you cannot build an orphanage with three pennies...with three pennies you can't do anything." "I know," she said, smiling, "but with God and three pennies I can do anything."

This is the power of imagination and vision! When we are able to remember our money stories and release the things that hinder us from God's money story, we are able to reimagine a world with new possibilities that we never imagined before.

Jesus had an incredible ability to imagine the world with God's story as the center. Today's main story is about such an act of imagination! Even though God had instructed the people of ancient Israel to take care of the widows, the orphans, and the poor among them, by the time of Jesus such care was replaced by greed, exploitation, and the neglect of the poor.

According to Mark 12, Jesus was in the temple in Jerusalem engaging in dialogue with different leaders. The temple in Jerusalem had become a place of power and domination over the people of Israel. People forgot, like people usually do, about putting love of God and love of neighbor at the center of their faith. Most of the leadership of Israel cooperated with the Romans to subdue the people and to keep them under control. So when a sincere scribe came to Jesus seeking his wisdom about the heart of the commandments, Jesus gave him the typical answer which is from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. The "Hear O Israel" verses are words that all Jews would know and recite as the most important commandment. Every Jew recited these verses in their morning and evening prayers. No one would have disagreed with Jesus on this. But Jesus did not leave that commandment vague. He followed it up with another one that made it clear what it means to love God in daily life. He used a part of a verse from Leviticus 19:18 that said, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus was making the case that loving God was completely connected to loving others. You can't separate the two. The words of 1 John 4:20 warn us about such division between beliefs and actions: "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen." That is our clue. If we have trouble loving others, we still have work to do in loving God. Many of the religious leaders of Jesus' time were living this kind of hypocrisy. They pretended to be pious. They knew all the commandments and the prayers by heart, but they devoured the widows and the vulnerable in society. They benefited from and supported an unjust system to ensure their own survival and power.

Then to prove his point about the hypocrisy of the religious leaders in the temple, Jesus points out to the offering of a poor widow. Here was a poor woman who hardly had anything, but she brought it all to the temple. This story shows the faith and obedience of

the widow, and it also exposes the unjust system of the temple and its treasury. Why was this woman so destitute? If the religious leaders were following the commandments of God faithfully, they would have taken care of her as they were supposed to. Jesus said that these so-called holy people prance around in long robes, make long prayers, and receive honorable recognition in the community, while in fact they were destroying people's lives.

The poor widow had nothing but the two coins! Why such destitution in comparison to the glory of a beautiful building like the temple? How could people be desensitized as to miss the irony of the scene? Jesus was trying to help people reimagine a different kind of world, a world where such contrast is not the norm and where people should be outraged about it.

It is interesting that when the temple was destroyed by the Romans around the year 70 CE, it was a shattering of all of the old ways of thinking for the Jewish people. As devastating as it was to lose the temple, it freed them up to go back to the basics of their faith and to question all of their assumptions. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus were also such pivotal events for his followers to really imagine a different world.

Nothing can wake you up to God's vision like a major crisis! This pandemic has made us question the dominant money values of our culture. The myth of only caring about ourselves, has been exposed. Thus, we have a great opportunity to reimagine the world in new and creative ways that are based on love.

Here is a story about the importance of reimagining the world through a focus on our connections and our need for each other. Tony Cowan tells this story, "When the great composer Franz Schubert died, he was survived by a group of brilliant students who were fiercely jealous of each other and had competed for Schubert's favor. He was also survived by his brother, who knew very well how these musicians would fight for scraps of the deceased master's work. Schubert's brother took one of Schubert's last manuscripts and cut it up into fragments, mailing one piece to each of the great man's students. They were aghast, knowing that no copy of the original manuscript existed. Some of them decided to mount and frame their fragment, treating it with reverence as a kind of holy relic of the departed genius. But a few months later, Schubert's brother sent them each a letter suggesting that they overlook their rivalry and come together to perform this late work. After all, he wrote, wouldn't that be a greater show of piety and appreciation than merely holding on to the fragments as relics? After much discussion and correspondence, Schubert's students agreed to come together and give a public performance of the work. The event was highly publicized and drew an enormous amount of enthusiasm from music lovers throughout the country. At the first rehearsal, however, Schubert's students realized that in the middle of the piece something was missing. More than just a few bars, it was a noticeable lacuna. Indeed, one of them had decided to withhold his fragment of the manuscript. When contacted, he abruptly refused to have anything to do with the project. He believed that his fragment would greatly increase in value because it would forever be known as 'the missing music' from Schubert's works. On the night of the concert, the musicians performed brilliantly and with deep feeling for the beloved composer. When they came to the part of the piece that was missing, they

simply held thirty-two bars of silence, heads bowed, bows unmoving, and then continued to the conclusion of the piece. The audience was astounded by this silent acknowledgment of Schubert's absence, and many commented that it was the emotional climax of the evening. Schubert's brother took the stage after the applause addressing the assembly: 'Tonight you have listened to one of Fran's final gifts to the world. The music we have heard has soothed us with the reminder of his subtle presence here. But it has also given us something more: there is no way to fill the hole in the world now that he has gone, there is no way to escape the silence, that rest which punctuated the performance. The quality of that silence, the remembrance of our own incompleteness, this is what compels us to come together again and again, so that the music will be completed by our common silence and there will, some day, be nothing missing. Only then will our collective work be fully performed.'" May our we have the same ability to reimagine our money story in our world today. Amen.