

What an image Mark gives us today, of Jesus sitting in the temple and watching. He is sitting in the place that is ostensibly set apart to honor God, theoretically, the holiest place in all of Israel, King Herod's magnificent 2nd temple.

After the first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, it was later, rebuilt after the exiles returned to Jerusalem. At first, it was an almost a modest structure. Then, when Herod the Great became king, about 40 years before Jesus was born, it was expanded.

The historian Josephus who was a contemporary of Herod, wrote that Herod was interested in perpetuating his name through building projects. And that his extensive construction programs were paid for by heavy taxes.

His masterpiece was the Temple of Jerusalem, which was expanded from its modest beginnings into the massive structure where Jesus and his disciples were sitting on the day of our gospel story.

Herod struck a deal with the Jewish religious authorities: the priests agreed to use the sacrificial rituals, called offerings, to construct the temple. So the offerings referred to in our scripture were used to build and maintain the temple that Herod saw as his legacy, as a testament to his own power.

The temple, that was originally built to house the ten commandments, God's holy law, the place that was intended to be a sign of hope and a light to the nations, a place to remember to love God and neighbor, had instead become a testament to the power of the monarchy. The government had co opted religion in defiance of God.

Not only had the temple been corrupted, but corrupted at the expense of the poor, the very people it was meant to protect.

The purposes of the monarchy and the temple had been corrupted by the egos of those in power, exemplified by the images of the scribes strutting around the courtyard and the rich casting their offerings into the treasury.

In the courtyard of the treasury, where Jesus and his disciples sat watching, there were thirteen wooden boxes with trumpet-shaped bronze funnels that guided the coins into the boxes. So you would throw your coins into the metal funnel, in the middle of a stone courtyard, surrounded by stone walls, and the sound of your coins cascading into the funnel would echo across the courtyard.

Everyone around you could clearly hear how much you gave. It was a pretty clever way to turn the giving of offerings to God into a competitive sport, boosting the egos of the rich and powerful, through the admiration of the crowds, who could both hear and see how much they gave.

As Jesus sat watching, he saw the self-centeredness of the scribes and the rich. In their efforts to impress their peers, they had become self-focused, just as Herod had become self-centered, in building the temple for his own glory.

And then, a poor widow walks into the courtyard, creating a dramatic contrast. She places two insignificant coins into the funnel. They make the smallest sound possible, but reveal a reversal of the ego, pride and arrogance of the moment before.

Here is someone who has nothing, and gives everything. Someone who is not giving for the admiration of others, but who in the moment when her material goods run out, goes to the temple, to ritualize her movement from poverty into the hands of God to sustain her life.

Jesus says “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.”

She gives her whole life to God.

The scribes rely on the admiration of others, while the widow declares her dependence on God.

While they are self-focused, she turns her whole life over to God.

There is a temptation here to categorize people into those who rely on God and those who don't. Into ego-centric people and God-centric people, but

I'd like to suggest that maybe it's normal to vacillate between the two, and part of a natural process of maturity and spiritual transformation, to move from reliance on self, and the admiration of others, toward a reliance on living more and more grounded, in the assurance of the love and admiration of God.

Some people call this moving from the false self to the true self, or the small self to the divine self.

Hopefully as we mature, through engagement in regular spiritual practice, we're better able to recognize when we are more self-focused and less God focused.

When we're young we search for our identity... we ask questions like who am I and what makes me important and valuable to others. We dress up like firemen or princesses, or pirates or animals. We try on different identities. But as we mature, and as we become more and more grounded by our spirituality, we come to realize, hopefully, that our true identity, our ground of being rests in God. The place where we are most fully at peace and the most truly ourselves. We come from God and we return to God and we belong to God. God sees us exactly how we are, and still loves us completely.

Richard Rohr says that the name the early hebrew people used for God, yah,weh was an imitation of the action of breathing. Yah, weh, yah, weh, so with every breath we take, we would be reminded that has breathed us into being and God that sustains us with each breath we take.

The best news is that God's love for us is completely reliable. It is always there waiting for us. Unlike human love, God's love is unchangeable, God sees us the same way throughout our whole lives. God sees our innermost being and calls us good.

We get trapped into believing that our security comes from how hard we work and how much esteem we cultivate. Our culture is one that is in love with efficiency, with innovation with progress, with trying to make the world a safer, more predictable more comfortable place.

But the reality is...it's not possible, not matter how hard we work, our world remains chaotic and unpredictable, everything can change in a second.

We are utterly and completely dependent on God for all that we are, and all that we have, and for our ultimate security. And the irony is, the moment we let go of trying to *make* ourselves secure, and claim our complete dependence on God, is the moment when we *are* the most secure. It's the moment when we allow ourselves to rest in the hands of the almighty. To just be.

And not only is this a peaceful, restful place to be, it's the perfect departure point, from which we extend that love to others. When we recognize that God loves us fully, then we can fully love the world.

Jesus knew that change was in the wind. The temple, the center of power and privilege, was about to fall. A few days before he had entered into Jerusalem and spent the week swatting at the hornets nest of the religious elite. Challenging Pharisees and Sadducees, lawyers and scribes, throwing out the money changers and turning over the tables in the temple courtyards. What he saw in Jerusalem was an institution that had lost it's way. An institution that in it's effort to sustain itself, had lost it's focus on God.

And then, on this day, when he saw that widow put in her last two coins, I think he was reminded that in a moment of change, it's those who can utterly depend on God, who might look like the weakest among us, but are instead those who have the most strength, because they can move into the unknown with confidence and security in God.

Jesus knew that the temple would fall. And he predicted that it would be raised up again in three days time. But this time instead of a massive construction project that would crush the poor, the new church would emerge as a massive group of people, united as one as the body of Christ , the new church.

It would be a movement filled with the holy spirit, not dependent on the illusion of earthly power, but instead, totally dependent on the true source of power and life. The new church resurrected as the body of Christ would be filled and sustained by the all powerful spirit of God.

I think this is why Jesus paid attention to the widow and her coins, in her he could see the birth of this new church, grounded by a dependence on God.

The world we live in is unpredictable, chaotic and oftentimes, things fall apart. As much as we try to build a security net, at the end of the day our best form of security is to practice letting go of our egos, and cultivating, nurturing our complete dependence on God.

Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth, * for there is no help in them. When they breathe their last, they return to earth, * and in that day their thoughts perish. Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help!

Spiritual transformation is an active process of letting go, living in the confusing dark space for a while. It's a free fall into the unknown. It's a return to the place we all began, a return to our true home with God.