

**“So many sacrifices; so much forgotten, but not ignored.”**

A sermon delivered by the Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman  
at St. Andrew’s United Church, Sudbury

**November 8, 2015**

**READINGS:** Hebrews 9:24-28

Mark 12:38-44

If you think about it, taking on an insurmountable opponent is not something most of us plan to do. I know we like to root for the underdog – the tortoise beats the hare in the famous Aesop Fable, and the biblical story of David defeating Goliath gets a lot of cheers from those who feel like the perennial underdogs. But let us be honest – are those seemingly impossible battles something we would enter willingly and gladly?

About 30 years ago I was asked to be a witness in a bitter divorce case, where the mother was struggling to keep her 11 year old son in a heated, expensive custody battle. Without the resources to do anything else, this woman was representing herself. Her estranged husband had one of the most expensive (and successful) divorce lawyers in the region. The lawyer was an individual I knew well from a seminal case he took of a teacher who had been fired for a violation of the Education Act. This lawyer lost the case, but made such a name for himself he moved to the community and instantly became a prominent member of the legal community, even running as a candidate for Parliament in 1988.

But in this case he thought he had all the legal arguments possible to win for his client, and though I knew him personally, had shared meals with him, and even attended community fundraising events with him and his wife, I felt like I was on trial as I spoke on behalf of this member of the congregation I served.

Quickly I learned that the agenda was to prove the mother was incapable of being an effective parent, and his client was a caring, attentive parent who had been blocked to fulfill his fatherly responsibilities.

I refused to play the game. I thought what was needed was to do the right thing, and that was speak up for a woman no one else was prepared to speak up about, but I had no interest or desire to speak against the father, also an occasional attendee at the church I served.

So I get it when Jesus speaks up for a woman who comes forward and offers a gift in the treasury. Amidst the wealthy of the ruling religious class, her offering is negligible, for some almost laughable. She would be no better regarded than the woman I was representing as a witness in court -- a single mother living on a minimum wage job trying to maintain a rural rented home for herself and her family.

And why defend someone who is not a memorable person? There is a sense that in our society people are evaluated for what they offer economically, culturally, or politically rather than evaluated for their value simply as humans.

Now this story follows closely the story of Jesus shared last week where he offered what the two main aspects of the law are: love God and love your neighbour.

Now I am not suggesting this is the next event in Jesus' life, for the gospels are not historical recordings and the events in Jesus' life are shared because they were memorable, and are not put in a temporal sequential order.

But no doubt recording one story about Jesus being challenged by the religious authorities on his teachings, and then standing up to them, is followed by another story of Jesus standing up to the arrogance and pompous attitudes of the religious elite, affirming the generosity of someone who did not even make a ripple in the understanding of religiously important people of that time.

Today advertisers can always market a company's products in ways that make any company sound like the best corporate citizen. That point is made in a recent Eastlink commercial where a young child intervenes in a corporate planning meeting by saying "My mom says she doesn't have time to stay home for a tech guy." And the whole corporate plan changes to offer evening and weekend appointment times due to a child's insight. Or so we are led to believe.

That is the impact of Jesus' observations around the offering. A big change of expectations where those forgotten are front and centre, and those in charge are servants to everyone else.

As we move into the week of November 11<sup>th</sup>, and struggle once again to try to understand the meaning of remembrance and warfare, we also need to hear the stories of those who represented the signs of peace and hope even in the horrors of war experienced.

But ultimately the stories that bring lasting encouragement for us all are those of understanding, cooperation, and forgiveness.

Bassam Aramin is a Palestinian who learned to fight for his rights as a Palestinian boy growing up in the ancient city of Hebron. At seventeen he was caught planning an attack on Israeli soldiers and ended up serving 7 years in prison. Yet in 2005 he co-founded ***Combatants for Peace***, a group that seeks understanding and peace opportunities among Palestinians and Israelis. Even after his 10 year-old daughter Abir was killed by a rubber bullet shot by an Israeli soldier outside of her school, he continued to seek peace and not war.

He knew that if he were to lash back after every act of aggression, there would be no hope for turning the corner.

And the story of diplomacy, and the solution to ending wars, often rests with the understated countries and the unknown individuals who make an impact on the world scene.

Who can forget "tank man" who on June 5, 1989 stood in front of a phalanx of tanks the day after the military quelled a demonstration in Tiananmen Square, Beijing. There is no record as to who that person is, but he has become the source of an iconic image of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

So much has happened, and so many individual stories of those who have sought peace, and shared peace, may be nestled in the realities of history, but the efforts of those who do good are not forgotten so long as we take the attitude of Jesus to lift up those small but meaningful examples of people who make a difference.

Thanks be to those who offer themselves no matter what kind of welcome they receive. They shall not be forgotten. They shall not be ignored.