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“This widow has put in more than all the rest” (Luke 21:3).

Daniel 1:1-6, 8-20: Luke 21:1-4.

Jesus measures true generosity by comparing those who give from their surplus to the widow who gave from her poverty. Her contribution to the temple treasury was tantamount to a desperate surrender to God’s providence. It was more than the larger contributions given for show and public attention.

Jesus offers us more than praise for a poor woman or a wise aphorism and a touching story. His attention to widows and orphans was a criticism of a social and religious system that created and justified wealth for the few and poverty for the many.

In the age of extreme income inequality, with a minority controlling a large share of the world’s wealth while the majority struggles to survive, the challenge is clear. Economic and political systems that fail to nurture the common good or promote inclusion are unsustainable and a formula for revolution. Philanthropy is not enough, and charity cannot replace justice.

Jesus critiqued the systems of his own time not to incite revolution but to prevent social chaos and violent conflict that would destroy human community. The remedy was basic fairness, truth and reconciliation and the restoration of dignity and respect for every member of the social family. This was God’s intent and design for the world and the goal of Creation.

There will be widows and orphans, the sick, blind, lame and even diseased members of the community, but by example and commitment Jesus refused to ignore or exclude them from the social contract that embraces everyone as brothers, sisters, neighbors and beloved children of God.

The Good News is inextricably tied to our response to the poor, for they are evangelists to the world. Failure to address their poverty and suffering is to deprive ourselves of God, who befriends and accompanies the poor. What we do for these least among our brothers and sisters we do for God. What we fail to do for them we fail to do for God, who lies hidden among the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned, excluded and persecuted of the world.

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