

I don't think the temple scribes were always so pompous or out of touch. While that may be how we know them today, do you honestly think they set out to become the kind of people chided for parading around for all to see? If anyone had told them that 2,000 years later they'd be an example of who not to become and what not to do, they'd laugh and shake their heads: “No way! Not us.” Like most of us here they were probably ambitious growing up. Who can fault them? It's what garners scholarships and promotions. On top of that, the social and economic strata that the scribes had been raised had outlined their future well before they could outline their own name.

So, what went wrong?

Somewhere,

somehow,

something happened.

The trappings of being a leader...

the beauty and richness of a perfectly executed service of worship...

the way in which their futures were secured financially—all of it—became the Kool-aid they couldn't stop drinking. More than that, it simply became what was. Few questioned it—not even the poor widow, which is terribly ironic considering that they were the ones entrusted with caring for *her* so that her offering wouldn't be the last thing she gave. Even still, it's doubtful they wished suffering upon vulnerable people like her, but life was about winners & losers and insiders & outsiders. Like us, they worked hard and wanted a good return on their investment. Like us, they wanted the best for their families and future. Like us, they had their own peccadilloes. And like us, they got into a habit of doing “their thing” day in and day out. In all their wanting and doing, they forgot they weren't simply created to get ahead.

They forgot that they were made to be in relationship with each other,
to lift each other up when they'd rather say whose wrong.

They forgot that they had been created in Love for Love.

They forgot what it was like to launch into the deep and believe that by serving, loving,
and seeking God they could create a world where there's no need for posturing and
grandstanding; there's no need for an old woman to be a burden.

They forgot to dream for more.

They forgot what it was like bank their loves on the love and dream of God.

They forgot what mattered most.

Like the religious leaders we can go about doing our “thing,” and never take the time to stop and ask why. Today, as we mark Consecration Sunday, we’re not merely returning our pledges of money, we’re reckoning with what matters most and rededicating all that we are—not only our money, but our hearts, our goals, and our community to God and God’s dream of wholeness for all.

So, what drives you? In all of your daily living, in your waking and rising, and in your going about the day, what are you giving your life to? What matters most? The question isn’t designed to instill guilt. The question, like all that Christ did, is intended to set you free—free from anything that leads you to don a robe that denies the inherent goodness and Spirit working in you.

As some of you know, I spent some time in New Hampshire, a period I now liken to a great adventure I need not repeat. Before deciding to pack up my bags and head north, I spend days talking with a friend about whether I should take the accept the job that would necessitate my move there. Over and over, she kept saying, “this doesn’t sound good for you. You could do it, but I don’t think it’s you. Nothing about that place seems good.” I heard her words in my heart, but it didn’t seem to matter. What I thought mattered was reckoning with the reality my dissertation was not yet done, my funding was nearing its end, and I had too much pride to admit that nothing felt quite as good at easing my financial fears than the thought of a padded account, even if that meant moving to the frozen tundra of New England.

It only took a week of 30-degree mornings and an environment of ruthless competition to realize that in my efforts to be self-sufficient, polished, and independent, I had forgotten that none of those things could withstand long days and nights of exhaustion and loneliness. None of that connect me to family and friends. None of that would make a life of meaning. I had bought into the lie that I had to be strong, adventurous, and all that other motivational-poster junk my English and math teachers had hanging above their desk. What I really needed was to say, “I don’t know the way to go, and I need help.” It seems like an easy decision now, but at the time I imagined I had a giant Q around my neck in neon green symbolizing “quitter.” But the robe that my fear and pride had wrought wore me down. Once I made the decision to leave, with the future unknown, I discovered that the very thing I feared became the very thing that saved me: letting go.

Friends, the essence and meaning of our lives aren't found in outshining, outbuilding, outsmarting, outgrowing, or outliving anyone. [As Brother James Koester remind us] "we simply need to know our inherent goodness as women and men made in the image...of God."¹ Once we're able to do that we'll see the worth of the widow in front of us and commit ourselves to her wellbeing and the dismantling of the structures that have left her vulnerable. Perhaps then we'll imbibe the truth that our two coins, our broken dreams, our quiet service behind the seasons, our failed marriage, our intractable child, our mistakes, our 9-5 paper-pushing don't define us, only the blood of the Lamb perfecting us into glory.

And, when I look out in front of me I see the beauty of the cross radiating in you.
I see people with joys and talents, and heartaches and dreams.
I see the fears of getting old, caring for your parents, providing for the kids, and paying the bills.
I see how easy it is to get into a rut of doing something over and over because you have to.
I see the comfort of expecting nothing but trouble lest you risk the disappoint of a dream differed.

But I also see something else.

I see people designed for love, made in love, and overflowing with the capacity to love.
This love isn't always cozy or fun. It's enduring, determined, selfless, and always seeks to learn and grow.
I see people trying to make sense of all that's happening in the world and watching their two coins—their willingness to ask hard questions, reach across the differences, and open their heart—healing the fractures in our world.
I see goodness and beauty.
I see potential and power to wow our neighbors with arms and hearts and doors open.
I see people who have the ability to step out in faith and risk what is for what the Spirit can do.
I see what two coins can do when multiplied by 100 people committed to lifting up the downtrodden—and not the ones we romanticize in the news, but the ones in our family whom are much harder to love.
When I look out, I see the family of God.
I see people who need to stop hiding behind their own fine robes and say "Here I am,

¹ Brother James Koester, "Life is Full of Meaning," SSJE, May 20, 2014, accessed November 10, 2018, <https://www.ssje.org/2014/05/20/life-is-full-of-meaning-br-james\-koester/>

Lord. I can do less." And then let go. Today.
And tomorrow.
And the day after that.
Stop trying to predict what can't be predicted, and trust that Christ is with you.

May we become risk-takers and dream-makers.
May we be truth-tellers and way-makers.
May we become the belovedness that is revealed in the bread and wine and says: you are whole and in my name you are stronger than you know.
Love.

Healing.

Peace.

Joy.

Those aren't church words.

They are your calling, your destiny, your purpose... and the world's, too. They are what matter most.

So, go forth. Go far. Go deep. Go wide. As the late Elijah Mays often declared:

I'm tired of sailing my little boat,
far inside the harbor bar.
I want to go out where the big ships float,
out on the deep where the great ones are.
And should my frail craft prove too slight
for waves that sweep those billows o'er,
I'd rather go down in the stirring fight
than drowse to death at the sheltered shore."²

It's time to go, my friends. Do not tarry. God will never leave you, for even at the moment that the sky turned the deepest black and death cast her shroud over creation, Jesus remained transfixed on the one thing that mattered most to him.

You.

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² Originally written by Daisy Rinhehart