



The Widow's Mite by Zeferino da Costa

“To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.”

Karl Barth

Prayer

O God, you are both giver and gift:
as we follow your Son to the Cross
in these days of crisis,
teach us the lesson of your self-emptying. Amen
Amen

“Out of her poverty, she has put in everything she had” Mark 38.44b

Jesus and his disciples are in the Temple in Jerusalem near the Treasury where offerings were made. In this painting by Zeferino da Costa, it is a scribe who is centre-stage. His fine robes cover his portly frame, an extravagant red sash nestling above the bulge of his well-fed stomach. There is nothing warm about him. With his powerful back to a near-naked child and his slender mother in the black of mourning, he directs the well-dressed man in front of him with a flourish. This is what Jesus observes and comments on, Jesus the haloed figure at the top of the steps, his pointing finger drawing the crowds' attention to the posturing scribe and the wealthy donor in sharp contrast to the quiet generosity of the widow who, unseen, gives everything she has.

In a few days time, Jesus' public ministry will be over. He will, in fact, be dead, having, as Barbara Brown Taylor puts it, “uncurled his fingers from around his own offering to give up the two copper coins of his life”.

What do we see as we gaze at this painting in the context of coronavirus?

Both Jesus and the widow understood what it is to give oneself away. Dying to self and living for others came naturally to them. The world is acutely conscious just now of the countless others who are cast in the same mold. That's why we are all standing on our doorsteps on Thursdays at 8pm to clap and clap and clap. Selflessness is uplifting and deeply moving. Our very lives depend upon it.

What 'two copper coins' of our own lives might we be moved to hand over in this crisis? Time? Energy? Loving-kindness?