



On your marks

One of the most often repeated sayings of Jesus is 'The first shall be last and the last shall be first'. This is a massive challenge to the way things usually work in this world, but again and again we discover that the kingdom of God turns everything upside down. During his ministry, Jesus regularly demonstrated what this paradox might look like in the way he showed God's love to the social outcast, the unloved stranger and even the hated enemy. The following session looks at how Jesus taught everyone an important lesson through someone whom nobody else noticed - the widow in the temple.

Get set

This is such a short story it might so easily be overlooked, especially as it is an incident that happened during Holy Week when so much else was going on! Jesus noticed the gift of the poor widow who put her couple of pennies into the collection at the temple in Jerusalem. He saw something that no one else had seen because, unlike others, he wasn't distracted by the loud clatter of the money that rolled out of the wallets of the capital's fat cats. It challenges us all to notice the quiet gifts of 'the last' and not be dazzled by the showy actions of 'the first' in this life!

You can find a retelling of the story from Luke 21:1 - 4 and Mark 12:41 - 44 in **The Barnabas Children's Bible** (story 299) and in [My First Bible](#) (p. 206).

You will need a selection of the following items:

- copper coins
- objects for a Kim's game
- a picture of the story from the Internet
- cardboard, silver and gold paper, glue, scissors, pencils
- pieces of square paper
- 10p pieces

Go!

Choose a way into the session or service from the following suggestions.

1. Bring in a big bag of copper coins and challenge your group to make as loud and as long a noise as possible by pouring them out on to different surfaces, at different speeds and into different containers.

In today's story, there was a lot of noise from the sound of coins clattering their way into a big collection box.

2. Play a Kim's game with your group using 20 objects related to 'giving' all arranged on a tray.

Give the group just 10 seconds to see the tray before covering it over. How many objects can they remember?

Suggested objects: coins of varying values; a purse; a small wrapped present; a thank-you card; a small flower; a receipt; a chocolate sweet; an apple; a ribbon; a used token; a piggy bank (or equivalent); an envelope; a stamp; an advert for a charity appeal; a collection bag; a cheque; a voucher; a party bag; and a gift of your own that means something special.

In today's story, there was a lot of giving going on.

3. Invite your group(s) to find a space to work together and become statues of various emotions from the story on the count of three: pride; fear; boredom; anger; shock; confusion; thoughtfulness.

Today's story stirred up quite a few mixed emotions.

Telling the story

In order to encourage new viewpoints on a familiar story, retell it using the following technique.

- Find a picture of the story. The Internet will give you access to a work of art based on just about any Bible story you can think of: simply type in the story and search for images. The National Gallery has a wonderful stock of pictures you could use. You should also come across images by artists from around the world - these often give us a useful non-Western perspective on a Bible story.
- Display the picture. An electronic Smart board, digital projection or OHP are ideal but you could also give out paper copies.
- Cover the picture up after a minute and ask the group what they remember about it.
- Display the picture again and talk about the details - colours, people, setting and the story that it shows.
- Now tell the story, but don't go into every detail at this stage.
- Next, tell them that you're going to bring the story to life together. Select one person to stand in your acting space and take the position of one of the characters in the picture. The rest of the group act as directors and instruct the person to change position until he or she and the character they are portraying in the picture are as similar as possible (stance, expression, props).
- Repeat this process for the other characters in the picture until there is a person representing each character, frozen in the right position. Say '1 2 3 Freeze' to give some urgency to the picture. '1 2 3 Relax' allows them to 'stand at ease' still roughly in position. It's worth practising getting back in position a few times until they can remember exactly what they are supposed to do.
- Ask each person to think of an action for their character. Run through these actions in turn.
- Now ask each person to think of a word, line or sound for their character. Run through these in turn.

- Next, run through the actions and sounds together in turn. Rearrange any that aren't yet in a logical order until it runs as a short stylised play.

Clearly, this storytelling works best where there are lots of people in the story - and, consequently, in the picture. With a smaller group, focus on just one part of the picture - a detail from the painting.

There is also a fun version of this story in [The Gospels Unplugged](#) (p. 122), which lends itself to use with younger children.

Talking about the story

Use the following open-ended questions for groups of people to discuss or talk about each question in turn as a group together. Ask them to come up with what they think might be the answers. What do their answers tell us about what Jesus is like? Or what the widow discovered? And what might the possible answers say about us?

- Why did the widow come to the temple that day?
- How did she come to have two small coins?
- What else might she have done with the two small coins?
- What prompted her to give away all that she had?
- Why did nobody else except Jesus notice her?
- Who other than the disciples heard what Jesus said?
- What did the widow do next?

Playing with the story

Choose one or two activities from the following suggestions.

1. Using two real copper coins and an artificial collection of cardboard coins, which everyone cuts out and covers in gold paper, create a big display of scales - where the two real coins on one side weigh more than all the 'artificial gold' coins put together. Add the words of Luke 21:4b to the display. While you make this as a group, talk about how 2p might be worth more than a rich person's fortune.
2. Make treasure boxes from square pieces of paper using origami - for instructions, click [here](#).

Jesus tells us to store up treasure in heaven (see Matthew 6:20 and Luke 12:21), just as the widow was doing in the story. Ask the group what sort of treasures they think should go into the box? Get them to draw pictures of these (non-monetary) treasures and put them in the box.

3. Make a series of coin rubbings using silver foil. Cut them out and glue them to cardboard discs. As a group, decide what words should go on the reverse of the coins to describe the sort of 'money' used in heaven - for example, love, trust, faith, hope, generosity, and so on.
4. Money isn't the only gift that we can give to each other. As a group or, if in a service, in groups, make up a simple scene from a birthday party, where a guest arrives and gives a different sort of present that costs no money and doesn't need wrapping. How creative can you



be?

Reflecting on the story

Gather in a circle or, if in church, invite those sitting near each other to do the following prayer exercise.

Slowly pass two small coins (two 10p pieces) from person to person, asking each person as they receive them to pause and think what could be done with this gift to help someone else. If they are willing, get people to share their thoughts and then pray for that situation. For example, it could be just what someone needs to make up enough money to buy a drink for someone... to pay off someone's debt... to get a sandwich for someone who is hungry... to afford a bus fare home... to make an important phone call... to enable someone in some parts of the world to buy some school books... or to help someone visiting a hospital to have change for a parking meter... and so on. After each idea shared, you could say:

Help us, Lord Jesus, to notice the little things and know how important they really are;

because with you the last come first and the first last.