

First Reading: Psalm 146

*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.*

*Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.*

*When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.*

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.*

*The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

*The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!*

As we continue with our sermon series, “*Disney in Lent: Are We There Yet?*”, coming in at number 4, this Disney film can be described in well, one word, supercalifragilisticexpialidocious! Yes, it is *Mary Poppins!*

During Lent, we often hear and study themes of repentance, prayer, self-discipline, sacrifice, love, faithfulness, and almsgiving to name a few. Connecting one or two of these with the film *Mary Poppins* was not too difficult, certainly much easier than trying to do so with number 8 on our list, *National Treasure*. In a way, it is because *National Treasure* was in my bracket, that I am delivering the message this morning. I volunteered to take on the film when it made the top 8 since it was one of my films and when placing it in my bracket, I really had not thought through about how it connected with the season of Lent and its themes. When we decided to worship with NEXT Church, and we knew we would not be using all the Disney films, I was the first to note that we no longer needed to do *National Treasure*. Kathryn and Mark said, hey, not so fast. So, I chose *Mary Poppins*. And as I was thinking about themes in the film, Kathryn said but, Cathay, no history. Well, there went anything with Mrs. Banks and her participation in the suffragette movement. There are certainly enough themes, just which one to decide upon, something about family or self-discipline, especially with those little imps, Jane and Michael or there is something about Mary Poppins, especially in the way she arrives from the sky (or heaven?), dispensing some great advice, completing her work uniting the Banks family, and then she ascends from whence she came. Minister and author Nadia Bolz-Weber connects this nicely in an Ascension Day tweet, “And then Jesus got all Mary Poppins and just sort of floated away.”<sup>1</sup> Hmmm, but we are not quite there yet as we continue on our journey through Lent.

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<sup>1</sup> Nadia Bolz-Weber, 2009 tweet, <http://www.preachinginpumps.com/gospel/far-from-ordinary/>

It is perhaps what might just be the heart of the film, that provides us with the perfect connection, just as Mary Poppins is “practically perfect in every way.”<sup>2</sup> The story of the Bird Woman who sits each day on the steps of St. Paul’s Cathedral, selling bags of breadcrumbs to feed the birds for a tuppence.

A tuppence, a few cents, two coins, an old woman at a church. Two coins, a temple, the widow’s offering. Turning to this morning’s second reading, Mark, Chapter 12, verses 38-44. Let us listen to God’s word:

*As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”*

*He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”*

The Story of God for the People of God, thanks Be to God.

Almsgiving. We often associate almsgiving in the sense of giving money, especially to the poor. While it certainly includes the act of giving money, it can and should include the giving of our time, ourselves in acts of service, sharing God’s love with others. What if we thought of almsgiving as time spent with other people, especially those who are disadvantaged and not just monetarily? “Poverty comes in many forms...materially, emotionally, and spiritually...there are people who are hungry and thirsty, in need of shelter, both in a physical sense and otherwise. Some are lonely and hunger for friendship, others carry heavy burdens of abuse and trauma, searching for freedom from oppressive memories, and some are marginalized because of disability, mental illness, race, identity, socioeconomic status and desire acceptance and inclusion.”<sup>3</sup> In what ways can we be present and see these needs, meet these needs? We must do so by seeing the humanity of each person, each beloved child of God, treating them equally and justly. Mary Poppins, as she introduces the children to the story of the bird woman, tells them “but sometimes a person we love through no fault of his own, can’t see past the end of his nose.”<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Banks really does not see the bird woman, truly see her, as his children do, wanting to help her feed the birds. He cannot see past the end of his nose. Later, as he is walking back to the bank, knowing he is about to be fired from his position after the excitement with his children deciding they wanted to give their tuppence to the bird woman rather than deposit it in the bank and causing a run on the bank, we witness the following (film clip shown):

What was Mr. Banks thinking as he walked over to the steps where the bird woman would normally be seated? Was he thinking of her? Seeing her? Thinking about his dismissal of her due to busyness or judging her inadequacies? Wondering, perhaps, if he had missed the opportunity to help her feed the

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<sup>2</sup> *Mary Poppins*, film, Walt Disney Company, 1964

<sup>3</sup> Grace Agolia, *Lenten Tuppence*, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/lenten-tuppence/>

<sup>4</sup> *Mary Poppins*, film, Walt Disney Company, 1964

birds when the birds so badly needed to be fed by someone? I know there have been times where I have failed to see past the end of my nose and missed opportunities to feed the birds. Maybe you have as well.

In *The Thoughtful Christian* class we have been exploring issues relating to race and the Church. In the work, *Trouble I've Seen* by Messiah University professor, Dr. Drew Hart, we read and discussed an experience that I see as an example of Jesus' criticism of the scribes. Dr. Hart recounts a morning he left his residence in Allison Hill and encountered a large mass of white people gathered along the sidewalk. He writes, "This was a bit odd. You do not normally see a lot of white people in this part of town. So of course, my curiosity was piqued. The first thing I observed as I approached was that they were all wearing bright, loud, matching yellow t-shirts. They clearly didn't want to be missed."<sup>5</sup> My thoughts as I read this description was not why there were matching t-shirts, but really a bright yellow? And why the need to call attention to whatever the group was doing? Dr. Hart continues to describe what he was witnessing as this large contingent was randomly handing out bags of groceries to whomever was walking by. He writes, "it was like an old episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, in which everyone was a winner...at first...I just thought to myself, "silly church folk," and shook my head...until I was close enough to read the words on their t-shirts...printed front and center on those bright t-shirts were "Harrisburg Invasion Day."<sup>6</sup> My reaction when reading this, wow! Apparently, this was a yearly event conducted by predominately white church congregations from outside of Allison Hill. Yes, they wanted to help the community, but first, did they need to do it so boldly and loudly, not to mention condescending with a feeling of "saving" rather than helping and working with the community. And, again, it made me wonder as I have participated in mission work in a variety of ways, if there may have been times I may have failed to see past the end of my nose.

As we heard in our gospel reading, Jesus first criticizes the scribes for performing their duties for the sake of appearance, basically to look good. When Jesus sits down opposite the treasury and observes the people coming to give, he compares the huge contributions of the rich people with the offering of the poor widow. He praises her offering as it comes from a sincere desire to please God and help others. "While the two parts of this reading might not seem to relate to each other, together they teach us that what we do with what God has entrusted to us, our abundance, whether material, time, or ourselves, it is the motivations for our actions which are important. What we do, how we do it, says a lot about who we are and whose we are. We are called to give from our hearts."<sup>7</sup> *All around the cathedral the saints and apostles, look down as she sells her wares, although you cannot see it, you know they are smiling.*<sup>8</sup>

There are so many people around us who are cold, hungry, and lonely, experiencing material, emotional, and spiritual poverty. "The questions we must ask ourselves, not only during Lent, but year-round...Where do I invest my tuppence? How do I show others I care? How do I encounter, truly see God's beloved children? Listen—she is calling to you...*Feed the birds, tuppence a bag*. While yes, respond by donating money, food, clothes, and other necessities, but let us also be attentive to the people we encounter. It can be as simple as what the bird woman sings, "*show them you care*" by asking them, "How can I help?", "Would you like to eat a meal with me?", "I will pray for you", "Thank you",

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<sup>5</sup> Drew Hart, *Trouble I've Seen*, Herald Press, Harrisonburg, VA, 2016, pg. 98

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg. 99

<sup>7</sup> "The Widow's Offering", Sparkhouse Digital curriculum, 1517 Media

<sup>8</sup> *Feed the Birds* lyrics, *Mary Poppins*, Walt Disney Company, 1964

and sometimes you don't need to say anything at all, but just be there, sitting in silence, dropping off a meal, leaving flowers, or making something from your heart like James Otis did for Sarah in our story this morning."<sup>9</sup>

How will we use our tuppence?

Remember, it can be the simplest act of love that changes the world for someone.

Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> Agolia, *Lenten Tuppence*