

**Be Careful Not to Step on Your Robe**  
**Bob Stillerman**  
**A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church**  
**Mark 12:38-44**  
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On this Sunday after an election Tuesday, I stare into a glass house. And I see long hemlines, and greetings of respect, and prominent places to sit and stand. And I hear speeches. Oh, do I hear speeches. And I've got a stone in my hand.

And if I am honest with you, I am angry. I feel bombarded, assaulted even, by politicians who utter rhetoric that challenges my every understanding and inclination of the world. There's one I'm thinking of, whose utter lack of comprehension for the concept of empathy rivals Pilate's utter lack of comprehension for the concept of truth. And this person believes the world is valued in dollar bills rather than in love.

And there's another politician, one who claims to be a champion of our shared denomination, and yet their every speech, every action, every initiative has been steeped in the idea of relegating women, and gay persons, and persons of color, and persons of other faiths as "less than" in the eyes of God. Not to mention this person's pursuit of political office stands in marked contrast to the universally-held Baptist principles of soul freedom, and the separation of church and state.

And when I hear them tell me about the better world they are creating – the one that keeps me safe from caravans of frightened refugees; the one that tells me it's rational, biblical even, to arm our church houses just to be on the cautious side; the one that tells me the world is better when it looks more like me: white and male and straight and steeped in status quo – When I hear them tell me about this world, I want to run and find Jesus in the Temple.

And I want to ask, "Are these the ones you speak of? The ones with long robes, and all the respect in the marketplace, and the best seat in church – the ones who pray-with-an-a for the widows on Sunday, and prey-with-an-e upon them on Monday through Saturday?"

And I want Jesus to say to me, "Why yes, Bob, indeed they are! You've done it. You've identified the hypocrites, and you my friend, in all your infinite wisdom, have been found righteous. And just today, I'm offering a special reward. You take that stone, and you cast it at that glass house, because I've put up plank-siding on yours, and there ain't nobody who's gonna be able to see the length of your robe, or criticize the seat you choose, or the speech you give."

And I say, "Thanks, Jesus. But, hey, while I'm asking, how 'bout one more favor." And he nods. And I say, "I think there's someone who needs this stone more than me. Would you mind if I gave it to Jim Acosta?"

I'm kidding. Kind of. I think there are days, when we look to the stories of Jesus not to affirm our own actions, but rather to condemn the behavior of those with whom we disagree. And this week, I really wanted Jesus to give me an "that-a-boy" for standing on the side of righteousness and identifying the examples of the less-than-righteous. And I wanted an election to be that measuring stick.

But Jesus is pretty awesome. He points us away from destructive habits. He doesn't let what the Scribes are doing distract him from what's important. Instead, he turns his attention to the people who are building a better world without the benefit of hemlines, or recognition, or special places of honor.

Jesus sees a widow. And I wonder how many jobs she works to make ends meet? I wonder how many days of wages she has lost this year – that time she stood in line for an ID card, just so she could prove hers is the name her parents gave her, and that she lives at the address most poll workers wouldn't dare drive to with a police escort; Or the day she took off to vote; Or the days she missed to help look after a sick grandchild; Or the times when the buses didn't run, because of inclement weather, and her legs were just too tired carry her to work.

And she has a remarkable faith. And when she says she's gonna pray on it, She's gonna. And God's gonna listen. And God's gonna be there. And even in the months where she cannot pay her rent or afford basic necessities, she will give to God what is God's. It's funny, people like the Scribes, they'll most likely mistake her generosity for foolishness, or confuse her poverty with punishment for sin. But this is a woman who knows the Shepherd God, and because she recognizes God's generosity, she also returns it. And she is full – full of what matters.

I don't think they had elections in Jesus' part of Palestine, or at least not fair ones. And I doubt there were Thursday night football games, or 24-hour news cycles, or congressional hearings that made him think the world was coming to an end. But I feel certain he had days like ours, when it seemed that too few people longed for, and lived for the world God promises. And I think Jesus realized the long arc of justice is not revealed in the spotlight; it's revealed in short hemlines, and forgotten corners of the Temple, and in the clinking and clanking of copper coins cobbled together with love.

Sardis Baptist Church, we've seen 30 years of elections, and our fair share of presidents, governors, senators, and representatives. Each of them, in their own way, advanced the kind of world we long for. Some more pointedly than others – I'll leave that debate for another time. But it seems to me, that just like the Scribes, these folks, and the power they represent, come and go. They are not constant. God is. And for thirty years, God has been revealed in the margins of this place – those quiet, simple, kind, brave, heartfelt moments where our actions were not bound up in Caesar's *Right Now*, but were instead bound up in God's *What's Gonna Be*.

And this morning, we gather at a table, where at least for a moment, we live in God's margins. Here in this place, to be vulnerable is to be victorious; to be broken is to be beautiful; to give from within is to give in God's light; to be valued is to simply be present; and to be righteous, to have that seat of honor – well it really doesn't matter when we're held in God's loving hands, because that love is more than enough. That love extends beyond the power, and the reach, and the supposed certainty of any referendum.

So come on. You don't need a long hemline. You don't need a stone. You don't need any pretense. You just need to be you. And in this place, that's always enough.

May it always be so! Amen.