

Mark 12:38-44

“Faith-filled Giving”

25th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 27 B)

November 10, 2024

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.

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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“And [Jesus] called His disciples to Him and said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on’” (Mark 12:43-44).

Some weeks ago, a rich young man came up to Jesus and asked Him, ***“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*** (Mark 10:17). After Jesus examined the heart issues of this rich young man, He said to him, ***“You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me”*** (Mark 10:21). That’s the last we hear of this rich young man as he left Jesus disgruntled since He could not part from his absolute dependence on his great possessions.

In today’s Gospel lesson, we find Jesus and His disciples sitting in the temple court of the women, where the temple offerings were deposited. As they sit, Jesus is examining the hearts of all the worshipers.

There, in the court of the women, are 13 trumpet-shaped receptacles. If you are a Millennial or older, like me, you may remember those highway toll baskets. Those offering receptacles would look similar to those toll baskets. Worshipers would walk up to those receptacles and drop in their coins of copper, silver, or gold.

There, with Jesus and His disciples, would be other onlookers watching what others had given to the temple treasury, in case they felt the urge to outdo their neighbor.

Then comes up a woman, a widow. She drops into the receptacle two small copper coins. In today’s money, this would be a fraction of a cent. But surprisingly, Jesus says to His disciples, ***“Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on”*** (Mark 12:43-44).

Now, how did Jesus know this? Did He ask this widow? No! He knew because as the Son of God, He could look into her heart. You see, Jesus knows vastly more about us and all others than we even know about ourselves.

This past Tuesday was the general election. You may be thrilled with the results, or you may be down in the dumps. Today, you may be thinking you know your future. But do you really know? Psalm 146 teaches us: ***“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish”*** (Psalm 146:3-4).

Do you really know everything that is going to happen in this coming year? Do you really know what your income will be? Do you really know what your overall financial situation will be? As much as we think we know – we don’t. We live in uncertainty. So much of our life is uncertain.

Today’s Gospel text teaches us many things. One of those things is proportional giving. Jesus said the rich had given out of their abundance. For the rich, it was a surplus, an overflow. They made a lot of money, and they gave a lot of money.

But for that widow, she gave all that she had – 100 percent. Now, the amount cannot compare, but percentage wise, that widow gave more than anyone else.

Proportional, or percentage giving, has always been the way God prescribed. Old Testament Israel was required to give 10 percent of the income they received. The tithe was God’s system of percentage giving.

One reason why God prescribed proportional giving is that it works at all income levels. Some have said, *“If I had a larger income, I would give a tithe, but right now, I can’t afford it.”*

Well, the nice thing about proportional giving is that it grows or shrinks with every paycheck. It works for everyone.

Now, in today’s Gospel text, Jesus still speaks about proportional giving, but He doesn’t demand any particular percentage. So, we can give more or less than ten percent. But our offerings should still reflect the way God has blessed us.

If the Old Testament people *had* to give 10 percent, and all they had was the promise of the Savior, what about how much *we* have been blessed? We are blessed with the certainty that the promise of the Savior has been fulfilled! Jesus Christ has come! We know He died and rose from the dead for us. We know that He has taken away sins. So, what's the proper proportional thanksgiving for salvation?

But oddly enough, today's text isn't primarily about proportional giving. Recall all those rich people dropping in their silver and gold into the receptacles. It is likely that many gave a hefty proportion. Remember, ten percent was commanded, but many exceeded that. And someone could give 70, or 80, or 90 percent and still not be commended by Jesus. And why is that? What makes this widow so easily commended by Jesus?

You see, if we think our tithes and offerings gets us in good with God, then no percentage is good. God doesn't need our tithes and offerings. He is God. He is wealthier beyond what we can imagine. However, the Church requires it and our neighbor in need requires it.

What really matters here is faith. God desires that we fear, love and trust in Him above all things. Faith is recognizing what God has done for us in the past and believing what He will continue to do for us in the future.

The widow had so little of everything, except faith. It may be no accident that Jesus speaks about the scribes taking advantage of widows in their poverty and then covering up their wickedness by saying long prayers so that everyone would think *them* to be holy. It could very well be that a scribe took advantage of this widow and has deposited *her* money as *his* money into the temple receptacle.

Even if that is the case, this widow still offers to God the last of her money. And she gave as a matter of faith. Her husband had died, which meant she lost her sole source of income. Yet, she believed that God had provided for her and that He would continue to provide for her into the future.

You see, Christian giving is always a matter of faith. As I said earlier, we don't know what tomorrow will bring. But we know Who already knows. So, do you recognize what God has done for you in the past? Do you trust that He will provide for you in the future? Christian giving is a question of faith. It is a question of trust. Christian giving is trusting that God will take care of you.

The widow completely trusted God. She trusted Him sacrificially.

Now, I'm not saying to empty out your bank accounts. That would be stupid and unwise. That would be a wrong interpretation of our text. But Jesus is inviting us to give Him ourselves. He is inviting us to trust in Him. He is inviting us to cling to Him as the Giver of all things for body and soul. If we truly trusted in Jesus, then our tithes and offerings would also represent that.

Like the rich young man in Mark 10, today's text about the widow's faith also leaves us with a cliffhanger. What happens next? We don't know.

Maybe Jesus and His disciples cared for her? Maybe she starved?

It's no accident that we don't know. If we did, it may have ruined the meaning of today's text.

We are left in uncertainty about the widow, because our Christian tithes and offerings are always to be given in the face of uncertainty, since our giving is always to be an exercise of faith. Again, we don't know our financial future. We don't know if we may face catastrophic bills. We don't know if you will lose your job, or if social security will dry up. We just don't know.

But we do have some things that are always certain. Christ is coming back. Eternal life is certain for everyone who trusts in Jesus. His death and resurrection has made forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation certain for everyone who clings to Jesus as their Lord.

Today's event at the temple is particularly thrilling for another reason. This would be Jesus' last visit to the temple. From there, He went forward to offer Himself – *all that He is* – on the cross to pay the price we could not pay, to make the contribution we could not make. On that Good Friday, He paid our entire debt of sin. In Christ alone, we are forgiven. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +