

## **“Giving All”**

Liturgical Date: Proper 27 (B)

Primary Text: St. Mark 12:38-44 (focus on 41-44)

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text, on this twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, is the Gospel Lesson from St. Mark 12. The title of today’s sermon is “Giving All” as we see an example of generous giving. JESUS COMMENDS THE POOR WIDOW WHO GAVE ALL SO THAT WE CAN SEE THE MODEL OF SERVANTHOOD IS GIVING ALL.

The Gospel Lesson from St. Mark takes place on Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus’ ministry is coming to a climax and He has been sparing with the religious authorities. He has recently answered their question about paying taxes with a brilliant response of “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” As always, Jesus got the better of His opponents in their confrontations. He had exposed their false intellectual claims and now He unmasks their moral failings.

In verses 38-40 Jesus calls the scribes out as hypocrites. They were people that liked to be recognized. They wore long robes in the marketplace and liked to be addressed as people of importance. They took the best seats in the synagogues and at feasts. They made long prayers, these prayers were long on form, but short on faith. They liked to bask in their importance, but as we have seen in the Gospel according to St. Mark, the one who is truly exalted is the one who humbles himself, the servant, the one who becomes least is the greatest. So these scribes were pious on the outside, but inwardly lost in self-righteousness and hypocrisy. They would receive their reward- the only thing that works and arrogance can earn-damnation.

We turn our attention to a short episode told for us in verses 41-44. Although four short verses, the account of the widow's mite is well known. Let's set the scene. Jesus is in the courtyard of the temple. This would be His last of several visits to the temple in Jerusalem, which He had first visited as an infant. In this part of the temple complex known as the "women's court"-as women were allowed to enter this area as well as men-there is a hum of activity. Passover is approaching, the biggest feast on the Jewish calendar, and countless throngs of pilgrims have streamed into Jerusalem. In this court, there were 13 mite boxes where people could come and deposit offerings. Jesus and the disciples observed many people come and make donations on this busy day during Passover week. Verse 41 tells us that many of the rich came and cast in large sums of money. No doubt many of these people were wealthy pilgrims who were in town for the observance of the feast and had likely been saving up money to donate at the temple.

Amongst the casting in of these large gifts came a poor widow. Widows were generally very poor at this time as the opportunities for women to earn a living were sparse. Jesus of course, in His divine nature, is all knowing but it was likely very obvious by the way that she was dressed that this woman was poor. Her gift is small in comparison to the others-or so it seemed. She approaches the mite box and put in two mites, which equaled a farthing.

So how much money was this? The ESV translates the "mites" as "copper coins". These two coins that the poor widow deposited were almost certainly "prutahs" or in Greek "leptons". They were the most common and least valuable coin of the time. They had first been minted about 100 years before Jesus was born and would remain in circulation for about 500 years.

They were minted using the cheap metal of copper and the imprint on them often became so worn the images could not even be made out. These two coins equaled a “farthing” or in a more contemporary translation a “penny”. The prutahs were issued by the Jewish government, as opposed to the Romans. The New Testament also speaks of the Roman “denarius” which one day’s wages for the average labor would be one denarius. Two prutahs would equal only 1/64 of a denarius. So in monetary value, this widow’s offering was very small-peanuts compared to what others were depositing.

But Jesus had something very interesting to say about the widow’s mite. He calls the disciples over to Him and says, “*Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury.*” As many of Jesus’ statements had, no doubt this also shocked the disciples who knew how small this was and how little this offering could finance. Jesus explains that the others gave out of their abundance and she gave out of her want, or poverty. But God does not measure by human standards and her gift showed the generous heart of one who gave freely (St. Matthew 10:8) and “God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). This is in much the same way as a billionaire giving a \$100 donation to a charity is not as big of a sacrifice than for someone living from paycheck to paycheck giving \$5.

We are entering a time of the year, the Christmas season will soon be upon us, when people are often in a more giving spirit. In fact many charities report that a large percentage of the gifts they receive for the entire year come in the weeks leading up to Christmas. While it is not an exact comparison, there is a little something similar to the scene that we read about in our Gospel Lesson in our modern society. You are going to see red kettles begin to pop up with people faithfully ringing bells soon. People will

place their “mites” into these kettles as a contribution to help the needy. These kettles are set up at locations that are our modern equivalent to temples: Wal-Mart and other shopping centers!

Several years ago I actually worked as a Salvation Army bell ringer. My station was the Commerce Wal-Mart just a few miles from here. It was a very interesting experience and I could tell some interesting stories about it. I was often very moved at how generous people were—including many who appeared to have very little compared to others. Other kettles I know were set up in more affluent locations, but day after day I saw the generosity of the people of the Commerce area as this location took in one of the highest levels of donations. Some people stuffed in large amounts of cash, but it often moved me the most when I saw a young child approach and put in a few pennies.

You see we hear stories on the news every Christmas season about people who give very large sums to the Salvation Army and other charities, but we don’t see too many news stories about those that put in a penny. But some of those small gifts are more generous than the large ones based on what the person had to give. In the LCMS, the LWML has a practice based on this text called “mite boxes”. Their members contribute loose change and small bills throughout the year. It doesn’t sound like much, but when combined with all the gifts from women around the country who participate it equals hundreds of thousands of dollars and funds scholarships and all manners of mission projects.

You see we serve a God that takes what seems small and insignificant and does mighty things with it. Gideon had only a small army, but won a great victory. The widow of Zarephath in our Old Testament Lesson only had a little flour and oil, but God multiplied it and fed her and her son for a

long period of time. A young boy only had 5 loaves and 2 fish, but it fed thousands. Jesus had a small band of disciples, but the Gospel would be preached throughout the world. So don't think that what you have to offer is small and insignificant because God can use it in a mighty way.

You received a pledge card last week as to what you would commit to the Lord's work at Christ the King Lutheran Church in 2022. I hope that you have prayerfully considered what you will give, as you will have an opportunity to present this pledge on the altar in just a few minutes. If not, there are pencils in the pew. Seriously, don't give out of guilt or compulsion, but freely out of grace as God has given freely out of His love for us. God has been so generous to us. You may feel you don't have as large of sum to contribute as others, but remember as we have seen today the total dollar amount is not the most important thing.

Remember that God can take a small seed and produce a great harvest. Consider this story. I had heard it before and "fact checked" it out online. The basis of it is true, although some embellishments have crept in over the years-which I have attempted to remove. I present it as it was originally reported by Rev. Russell H. Conwell, the Pastor of the church in this story.

In the 1880s there was a little girl named Hattie May Wiatt who showed up to attend Sunday School at a growing church in Philadelphia, Grace Baptist. In fact, there were so many children in attendance that the girl was turned away as there was no room for her. Rev. Conwell assured her that they wanted to build a bigger building to accommodate all the children who wanted to attend. Hattie determined to help and began saving her pennies and did any odd jobs she could to earn a little money. Life was hard for the poor in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Children often had to work long

hours and enjoyed few of the luxuries that children today are used to. Sickness and death were also common and medicine was primitive by today's standards. Sadly, young Hattie became ill and died.

At the funeral, Hattie's parents presented their daughter's savings to Rev. Conwell and told the pastor that they were for the building fund. It was 57 pennies. Now this was a good bit of money for a poor child to have in the 1880s, but of course not nearly enough to purchase property and build a large church building. But this is not the end of the story.

The church found a property that they wanted to build on. The congregation had no money for a down payment, but Rev. Conwell shared the story of the little girl and her pennies with the landowner-who was not a church member and in fact did not attend church anywhere. But moved by this little girl's gift he agreed to sell the land much below market value for \$10,000, with a very generous interest rate of 5% , and taking only 57 cents as the down payment! A wealthy member of the church then contributed \$10,000 and the church owned property debt free! The land that was purchased became the site of Temple Baptist Church, Temple University, and a hospital today known as Temple University Hospital. All of this started with a little girl giving all that she had to give to the Lord's work. Yes, God can take what we see as a little and do a lot!

Now I want to point out one last thing from our text from St. Mark. Verse 44 says that the widow cast all that she had that day into the mite box, "even all her living"-what she had to live on. She had two mites. Perhaps she was tempted to give one and keep the other-but she gave both. Now I don't believe this is teaching us that we have to give every penny we earn to God (as it is all his anyway) as this was likely a very special Passover week offering for her. The point is that she was generous and giving.

And there would be another special Passover offering that week as well. One that no one else could give. One that would give everything the person had. One that would require the person's own life. One that would exceed any offering ever made. One that would bear infinite return and benefit for the world. A great case can be made for the best verse on giving in the Bible being John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world, that he **gave** his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" JESUS COMMENDS THE POOR WIDOW WHO GAVE ALL SO THAT WE CAN SEE THE MODEL OF SERVANTHOOD IS GIVING ALL. On the Cross of Calvary Jesus, true man and true God, would give His all as the offering-the blood sacrifice-for the sins of the whole world. Through this we have the greatest gift of all-salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.