

"The Greatest Gift"

November 11, 2018

Mark 12: 38-44

³⁸ As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely." ⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. ⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on."



Let us pray...

Last week, I began a new sermon series called "Gifts of Love". In the message last Sunday, we focused in on what Jesus called the two greatest commandments – to love God with all of our heart soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Last week I spoke of the need to know and to share our own story of faith. At a conference that I was at a month ago, the pastor who was teaching suggested that none of our stories of faith are too small or too insignificant or too ordinary. To those who thought that perhaps their faith story was too small or too ordinary, Roz asked this simple question:

Where would you be without Jesus? Last Sunday we worked on our faith story and hopefully you fleshed it out a bit more in the last week. If you listened to the message last week, I hope that you too thought about your faith story. Almost immediately after getting home from church, one of our members, Tresh, tagged me in a video that he thought went great with the message and with the idea of sharing our faith with another.

I could not agree more, so I want to share the contents of the video with you today as a way to connect sharing our faith, which is one of the greatest gifts we can give another person, with the widow's offering that is the focus of today's scripture passage. The video is called "Eating Twinkies with God". (*Link at end of document.*) The video begins with a young boy gathering up Twinkies and bottles of apple juice to put in his backpack. As he is finishing up, his mom walks into the kitchen and asks, "Where are you off to"? The boy tells his mom he is off to find God. She replies, "I see. Dinner is at six. Don't be late". The boy heads out, rides a bus, then a train, arriving at the park.



Sitting on the bench is an older, African-American woman with what appears to be all of her belongings in a two-wheeled cart. The boy sits down and gets out a package of Twinkies. Just as he is about to take a bite, he stops and hands her the Twinkie. After a polite 'thank you' and 'you're welcome', the two converse and giggle as they eat their Twinkies. The boy shares a bottle of apple juice and, checking his watch, says, "Gotta go". They share a big hug and smile and, as he is walking away, he stops and gives her one last big smile and a wave.

The scene returns to the kitchen at the boy's home and Mom pops her head in and asks, "Did you find him"? The boy smiles and says, "Mom, God's a woman. And she has the most beautiful smile". The scene then cuts to another homeless woman sitting on the side of the road with a sign that says, "Need money for food". As the African-American woman sits down by her, she is full of smiles. The second woman asks, "Why are you in such a good mood"? The first woman replies, "I just ate Twinkies with God. He is much younger than I expected him to be" with a smile that still covers ear to ear. This small gift of love that the boy offered a neighbor – a Twinkie and a bottle of apple juice, a little conversation with a hug and a smile – they made all the difference in the world to the woman. Our simple stories of faith have the same power. Just a basic story of faith, the tale of what Jesus has done in your life, can bring hope and light and love into the life of another. It may be something small, but it can make all the difference in the world.

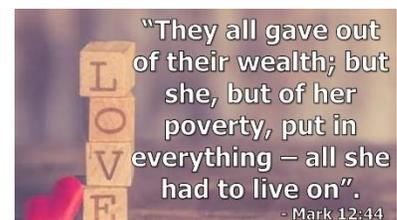


In our passage today, Jesus is sitting in the temple with His disciples, watching people come and place their offerings in the temple treasury. He has just finished teaching, or more accurately correcting, the ways of the religious leaders. Jesus has pointed out how they love to wear big, flowing robes so that all notice them and greet them in the marketplaces. He has noted how they love the seats of honor at events and in the synagogues. There they are noticed. His final observations are that they "devour widow's houses" and "pray lengthy prayers". More of the "look at me" attitude. Notice how special, how holy I am. This theme continues as they sit and watch the wealthy put in large amounts. Clang, clang, clang go the large amounts of coins dropped in by the wealthy. Clang,

clang, clang. Clang, clang, clang!! Then along comes the widow. I can almost picture her shuffling along slowly as she approaches the treasury box. I imagine that she moves along slowly because she carries much weight upon her small, frail shoulders. She is confident in her decision to give to God what she has in her hand. But it is a weighty decision. Clink, clink go the two small copper coins as she releases them from her grasp as they fall into the box. Her two small copper coins mingle quickly with the piles of gold and silver already inside the box.



Jesus calls the disciples around and says to them, *"Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on"*. A small gift of love. Just two small copper coins. Imagine. Probably none of us are living in such a state as to have all of our savings, all of our net worth, represented by a few coins or by a few dollars. We all live in the wealth that the others in our passage gave from. But we can imagine what it would be like to give all of our money to God. Imagine going to the bank before church and emptying out all of your accounts. Imagine taking that and every other dollar and quarter and dime and nickel and penny that you could find. Imagine taking everything you have, bringing it to church, and dropping it in the offering plate. Imagine. Imagine what it would feel like to release that wad of cash and coins into the offering plate. We would mingle together joy and fear, exhilaration and doubt, peace and confusion. We would probably be a hot mess.



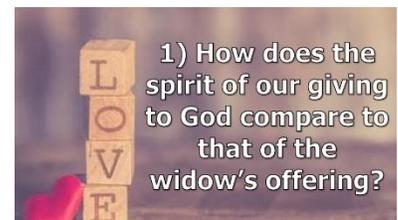
But not our widow. She drops the two small coins in and walks away. She walks away content and trusting that God will provide. The widow is like many other nameless folks in the Bible who offered all they could, meager as it was.

Remember the boy whose sack lunch containing some loaves and fish fed the multitude? Sometimes they offered their best, knowing that even that paled in comparison to what Jesus had to offer. Remember the woman who offered her only jar of perfume as a gift to prepare Jesus' body for burial? What do these stories and the story of the widow's offering have in common? They are stories of extravagant generosity. They are stories that exhibit trust and sacrifice and obedience. They are stories of giving that go far above our common understanding of how we are called to give to God. These are all stories that have a deep personal impact as well.

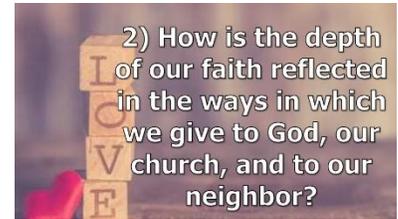
For the boy who gave his lunch – imagine the impact he felt from his simple gift of a little food that he then saw feed thousands and thousands of people. For the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with the perfume – imagine the impact of knowing that she, a sinner and an outcast, touched Jesus, the Son of God, at a deeply personal level. The same is true of the widow's offering. In terms of the impact on the temple, no, her two small copper coins did not amount to much. The two small copper coins – they were a fraction of a day's wage. They would not buy any more animals to sacrifice or supply more candles for worship. But the difference it made was just as important though. The gift, the giving of these two small coins, made a huge difference in the life and heart of the giver.

The second the widow heard the clink, clink of her two coins, she knew that her life depended upon God. Such a contrast to the wealthy who put in large sums. They would return to their nice homes and fine clothes. They would sit down to a table of sumptuous food prepared by the hands of those under them. Their life was not hampered or impinged upon by the offering that they gave. It was out of their excess that they gave. As the widow walked away, she had to wonder, at least for a moment, where her next meal was coming from. She had to ponder, at least for a brief instance, what it would be like to have to be hungry or cold or thirsty until she could scrape together her next two coins.

Yet, deep inside, the widow knew that she had done the right thing. She knew that her offering reflected her commitment to God. The money that she gave that day, it reflected both her gratitude for all of the ways that God had blessed her and it reflected her desire to be a part of the work of God in her community. Yes, the widow gave painfully, but she also gave joyfully. From the widow's offering and the depth of faith in which she offered it to God, we must in turn ask ourselves a couple of questions. First, how does the spirit of our giving to God compare to that of the widow's offering? Is our giving a little bit painful – reflecting a little sacrifice in our gift? Is our giving also done joyfully – reflecting the idea that we are simply returning a small portion of what God has richly blessed each of us with so that God's work can be done for our neighbors or for our community?



Second, how is the depth of our faith reflected in the ways in which we give to God, to our church, and to our neighbors? Do we give generously to God, reflecting a faith that God will continue to be faithful to us in the future? Or do we give wondering if God will continue to bless us, to care for us, to love us?



It was just a Twinkie and a bottle of apple juice, right? It was worth a dollar or two, at most. The story of how God called me, redeemed me, and walks daily with me as my Lord and Savior is a pretty simple story, right? It is small and ordinary and unimportant compared with the story of Jesus or Paul or Martin Luther or many other men. That simple Twinkie and bottle of apple juice allowed a young boy to both see God and to be seen as God. No, he was not really God. Nor was the African-American woman. But in their simple interaction, in the simple offering of a gift of love, they were both blessed. In the other, both saw the face of God. When you or I share our gifts – whether that is the gift of our time, our resources, our talents, or our story – we too are entering into a holy space where we can be both a blessing and where we can be blessed. This week, may you and I be both a blessing and may we be blessed over and over with the privilege of offering gifts of love to God, to our churches, and to our neighbors. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) If you were more generous with your time, talents, resources, or story – how would you see your faith grow?
- 2) What area of giving do you sense God calling you to? Pray for God to give you the courage or determination or confidence or... to follow the call.
- 3) Think about a “gift of love” that you can offer this week. Before next Sunday, find a way to offer that gift to God, the church, or to neighbor.

Link to “Eating Twinkies with God” video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9N8OXkN0Rk&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR0vSxWduFPVOM2RIGYE8WGksAWvLoYrExLCN_0GxiB5AS73DDLq8uit9cw