

## “Giving Your All...Giving Sacrificially”

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**First Presbyterian Church**  
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**New Testament Lesson:** Mark 12:38-44

**Old Testament Lesson:** Psalm 146

The Pastor/Head of Staff at my first church, when I was an associate, used to say, “I can tell you your values. Just show me your checkbook.” The checkbook registry or the family budget is a mirror that reflects who we really are.

I think he stole that from Jesus, this idea that how we deal with what money we have tells a lot about who we serve. Do we serve at the pleasure of money or do we serve at the pleasure of God, for the betterment of our fellow human beings.

The scribes who Jesus is talking about when he says “beware of the scribes” were the record keepers and dealmakers of society. Their job was to work for the betterment of their fellow human beings. As it turned out, they were more committed to the betterment of themselves – as in making sure they had it better than anyone else, no matter the cost. “Beware of the scribes,” says Jesus, the ones “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.”

Not the greater reward, but the greater condemnation. That’s a pretty harsh warning for those who were given much and of whom much is expected. And they failed to live up to that, they failed to their place in society and their calling in the sight of God. The two things are actually the same – our place in society and our calling in the sight of God.

What Jesus teaches here is that no matter what your place in society is, God calls all of us to give sacrificially in supporting the faith community. That’s what the treasury was for back then; supporting the faith community. What we would call the church. The fact that these two stories are grouped together – the one about people who have more money compared to the one about the widow who has little or no money – this shows that both the rich and the poor are called to give, to financially support the community of faith, to some degree or another, however they are able.

It’s important to note that with the widow giving all she had Jesus is not advocating sacrificial giving to the point of financial ruin. Jesus is and has always been very concerned about providing for those in need.

What Jesus is showing us here is that everyone – including those struggling financially – everyone has value and everyone is important in the financial health of the faith community, no matter how much or how little they give; the amount is not what’s important.

How much you give is not what's important. Let's look at what is important. When Jesus "sat down opposite the treasury, (he) watched the crowd putting money into the treasury," he watched them filling out their pledge cards and bringing them to the Lord's Table. "Many rich people put in large sums" of money and "a poor widow ... put in two small copper coins...."

The rich gave out of their abundance rather than giving sacrificially, and so they suffered their whole lives from their love of money – never had enough. But the widow gave all she could and then some – she gave sacrificially – and because of that, what she gave is worth so much more, "more says Jesus, than all those who (contributed) to the treasury." Both the widow and the rich are important to the financial health of the faith community, and both the widow and the rich had a difficult decision to make in contributing to their faith community. The widow – she stepped up to that challenge and made the tough decision to give sacrificially. The rich did not. They gave what they were comfortable with and not one penny more.

Remember that dollar bill we talked to during our Prayer of Confession. Well, it is time for that bill to talk back. A \$100 bill, a \$20 bill and a \$1 bill are about to go into the shredder at the end of their lives. The 100 says, "I've seen the whole world during my lifetime. Why, I've been on cruises in the Caribbean, safaris in Africa and vacations in Europe." The 20 says, "Well, I haven't done quite as well, but I have been to Atlantic City, Disneyland and Starbucks." They both turn to the \$1 bill and ask, "How about you?" Not wanting to be outdone, it says, "I've seen the whole country as well. I've been from church to church to church ..." Then the 100 says, "Church ...? What's a church?"

Next week is when we, the members and friends of this church, bring forth our financial Commitment Cards and place them on the Lord's Table. Everyone's role in this moment in the life of the church is important, whether you've never seen a \$100 bill before or not.

And everyone's decision in deciding how much to pledge is difficult – or it should be. I don't care if your pledge is big or small, as long as it is sacrificial. I firmly believe that we are blessed beyond measure when we give sacrificially. I believe this because I have experienced it in my life – money does not have the hold on me that it could if it weren't for my faith.

In those moments when I fail to break free from the fear-based grip that money tends to have on us all, I suffer, financially and spiritually. We all do – we suffer from our love of money – there's never enough money when the love of money gets its hooks in us.

But when we give sacrificially – with a joyous faith-filled heart – we receive so much more. Ours is not a faith of scarcity, but a faith of abundance! We are so blessed financially as a church, and therefore, as individuals. There is not one person who is a member or friend or even a stranger at this church who needs to worry about his or her daily needs.

When a family comes to me in need, I work on your behalf to ensure they get over the hump and onto a firm foundation, so that they can support themselves moving forward. Our prayer is that our giving of financial assistance will be multiplied.

We are blessed by the way Jesus takes the value of whatever is given and transforms it from scarcity to abundance. We see this over and over again – fish and loaves, wine, cloaks (clothing), banquet halls, and upper rooms. Abundance in all of it.

We see this in today's New Testament lesson when the widow gives her last two copper coins. (Jesus) calls his disciples and says to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more (from scarcity) 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.'" What just happened there?

Abundance or scarcity. Unless you and I give sacrificially – meaning we decide what we can comfortably give and then in faith we give a little more, maybe a lot more, – unless we give sacrificially, our abundance becomes scarce. The love of money gets a hold of us and we never have enough. Scarcity is not only for the poor, and the joy of giving is not only for the rich.

Those who truly don't have enough, I encourage you and everyone to make a pledge next week. Prayerfully consider what you might be able to give in 2016 – what you would want to be able to give if all your prayers were answered.

Now be reasonable; look at where you might actually be in 2016, and then put a number on your Commitment Card and bring it to the Lord's Table next Sunday. The joy of giving is not just for the rich – everyone has value; everyone is important. Just look what God did with the two pennies given by the widow. How far did those two pennies go?

Oh, they went far! They went all the way from the year 30-something AD to the year 2015, and beyond. Jesus transformed her scarcity into our abundance, in the teaching of his word, based on the example of her giving which lives on in us today.

Think about it, where would we be if she had withheld even one of those pennies? We'd be all the poorer, that's where. The widow had a choice to give a little or a lot – one penny or two pennies. And because she and those like her gave sacrificially, we have our church today. We have the church, the church that was built on the teachings of Jesus. Christian faith and values are alive today, for the benefit of all.

The question for us this week as we consider what to put on our Pledge Cards – the question is, not what will we give, but rather how will we give. Will we give out of our fear of scarcity or will we give from Christ's promise of abundance?

Amen.

## Pastoral Prayer

Lord God, help us to open our hearts to your great and amazing love. Help us also to open our minds to your word of truth through which comes a universal and lasting peace.

Help us, Lord, in the aftermath of terror and loss in Paris and unfolding violence around the world to seek and employ the power of your love and compassion.

We pray for our global neighbors who, in the midst of the grace of ordinary life – while at work, or at play – have been violently attacked by terrorists.

Help us, Lord, to do what we can to build up the Kingdom you envision, through our prayers, through our church, through our families and alongside our friends.

You have blessed us with time, talents, and what you would call treasures – our money and possessions. Inspire us to be mindful of you in how we use our resources and relate to the world around us.

Help us, Lord, to be a blessing in the lives of those in need, those we hold in our thoughts and prayers, and especially for Nancy Shepherd, Emily Johnson, Mary Havenhill, and all those fighting disease and recovering from surgery or other medical procedures.

And thank you, Lord, for all our blessings and gifts. We rejoice in your presence in our lives and in our world. We count on it, and we depend on it alone, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we  
forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,  
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever.  
Amen.**