

Sermon for November 10, 2024 – 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 12:41-44 (EHV)

**Theme: Jesus loves offerings that are...**

- 1) Given out of love.
- 2) Given in faith.

*<sup>41</sup>Jesus sat down opposite the offering box and was watching how the crowd put money into it. Many rich people put in large amounts. <sup>42</sup>One poor widow came and put in two small bronze coins, worth less than a penny. <sup>43</sup>He called his disciples together and said to them, “Amen I tell you: This poor widow put more into the offering box than all the others. <sup>44</sup>For they all gave out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all that she had to live on.”*

Why do you give money to the Church? Do you view your offering as a type of “membership” or “service” fee payment? Are you worried the congregation will cease to exist if you don’t give money? Do you donate to the church to feel good about yourself? Or are you someone who rarely gives an offering because you don’t feel the need to do so?

It’s vital for us to reflect on our reasons for giving to the church. Why? So that our offerings come from a heart filled with genuine gratitude and trust in the Lord—rather than from obligation or self-interest. The LORD seeks offerings that express how deeply we love and trust Him, the God who sacrificed His only Son for our salvation.

Let us learn from the example of a poor widow that **Jesus loves offerings that are...** 1) given out of love and 2) given in faith.

Part One: Jesus loves offerings that are given out of love.

Our sermon text takes place on the Wednesday before Jesus’ crucifixion. He had just spent considerable time debating with the Pharisees, Sadducees and teachers of the law - warning the crowd that gathered around him of their hypocrisy and greed.

After this, <sup>41</sup>Jesus sat down opposite the offering box and was watching how the crowd put money into it. According to tradition, the temple housed 13 trumpet-shaped chests around the women’s court—nine for offerings mandated by the Mosaic law, and four reserved for voluntary gifts above and beyond what was required. Our text seems to indicate that Jesus seated himself next to one of these freewill offering chests.

Jesus was keenly interested in the people’s offerings. We can almost sense His omniscient gaze into the heart of every worshiper. He not only saw what they contributed, but why they did so. Were these voluntary gifts given out of genuine love for the LORD, or were they hypocritical displays of piety? Jesus knew the answer.

Jesus once said: “*Where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am among them.*”<sup>i</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, just as he was with his disciples in the temple, so he is with us now: keenly observing our worship and offerings with intent, searching our hearts for true faith and love in Him above all else.

In the temple, Jesus saw that *many rich people put in large amounts*. I want to pause here for a moment and say something positive about the Jewish people of Jesus’ day: many did not just give the minimum required by the law. No, they joyfully offered more.

Now, while some of these Jews may have given their offerings for the wrong reasons, notice that Jesus does not condemn them. Rather, he places their offerings in contrast with the far greater offering made by the poor widow — holding it as exemplary. That seems to indicate that some Jews made offerings with the proper heart (namely out of love for their LORD) but not with the degree of faith that the widow had.

Part Two: Jesus loves offerings that are given in faith.

We read: <sup>42</sup>*One poor widow came and put in two small bronze coins, worth less than a penny.*

It seems as if no one other than Jesus noticed this poor widow, and yet she is worthy of note. The fact that she carried around her entire life savings indicates that she had a tough life with few relatives to help. No one would’ve blamed her if she had joined the ranks of beggars in the temple court. She needed money. But, moved by the Lord’s promises, instead of begging for money, she made an offering of it – not because she felt like she was going to get kicked out of the temple if she didn’t, nor because she thought that God demanded it of her, nor to earn His favour. No, she offered her two coins simply because she loved her LORD and trusted in his promise to mercifully forgive all her sins and provide all she needed for life.

Now, we might be tempted to wonder what made the widow’s offering so great if it was worth less than a fraction of a penny. I mean, couldn’t she have given it because there was nothing else she could buy with such little money?

Actually, the word translated as “penny” was a coin worth 1/64<sup>th</sup> of a day labourer’s wage. Her two coins, therefore, probably would have been worth enough to buy a couple of eggs, some small pieces of bread, or some milk. In other words, she offered the LORD her last meal – much like the widow of Zarephath did when she used her last bit of flour and oil to feed Elijah.

What was Jesus’ reaction to this offering? <sup>43</sup>*He called his disciples together and said to them, “Amen I tell you: This poor widow put more into the offering box than all the others.”*

Mark well what Jesus told his disciples: the widow’s seemingly small, insignificant offering was more important to God than the great wealth offered by all the others at the temple that day. Why? Jesus tells us:

<sup>44</sup>“For they all gave out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all that she had to live on.”

In other words, all the money given by others was money they didn't need or wouldn't miss. It was the “leftovers” of their lives. In contrast, the widow needed the money she lovingly offered the LORD. It was a genuine sacrifice given in trust that the LORD would continue to provide her daily bread. Her offering echoed the truth Jesus shared in the Sermon on the Mount: “*So do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For the unbelievers chase after all these things. Certainly, your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*”<sup>ii</sup>

“What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?” – those are the questions most of the Jews asked themselves before they went to the temple, and didn't we ask ourselves the same questions before we came to church today? And don't we often try to answer these questions before deciding what to offer our LORD?

But that's backwards thinking in God's eyes! The LORD wants us to consider him as our top priority. Why? Because all that we have and are comes from him, as we confess in Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Apostles Creed: *I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life.*

The Lord not only saved us from our sins, but he also sustains us by providing everything we need for our bodily life. The widow's offering proves that she believed this fact. Do our offerings reveal such faith in our hearts?

So, what happened to the widow after she made this offering? Did she die of starvation? Did the LORD reward her by showering gold upon her from heaven? Likely not. Instead, she probably continued to endure poverty and hardship throughout her life. Yet, I am confident that the Lord stood by her side, providing for her needs and nurturing her spirit. In the end, He delivered her soul home to Himself in heaven, where she is now rich beyond measure. Why? All because Jesus gave up everything for her, as the Bible says: *You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.*<sup>iii</sup>

Having meditated on the widow's offering, let me ask you again: why do you give what you give to the Lord? Please understand my true intent behind this question. I am not trying to guilt you into contributing more money to the church. No, my intent is to get you to think about your relationship with God. Are your offerings given out of love for Him as a way to express gratitude and demonstrate trust in His promised grace? Or are your offerings merely “something you do”—like paying for a service, giving a tip, or donating to charity?

I wish I could say that my offerings consistently reflect the deep fear, love, and trust I hold for God in my heart. But I would be lying if I claimed that. Unfortunately, often, my giving is more like that of the rest of the Jews than that of the widow: given out of my surplus rather than challenging my faith. And, if I had to guess, many of you would have to confess the same, right?

But how can we change this? How can we strengthen our faith to where we may live and give as fearlessly as the poor widow did in the temple? The answer lies in continually meditating on all the promises God makes to you in the Bible through Jesus. And what will you discover when you do this? First, you will see that God loves you immensely, having sent His one and only Son to suffer and die for your sins so that you could live with Him forever in heaven. And if, as the Bible says, God *did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?*<sup>iv</sup>

Yes, because God gave us Jesus, you can be confident that God will keep every promise he makes concerning you in Scripture. You can boldly act on his invitation to live generously, trusting that he will provide you with everything you need, even if you give away everything you have. The Bible is filled with accounts that prove this truth. He even challenged His Old Testament people: *Bring the complete tithe to the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Just test me in this, says the LORD of Armies. See whether I do not open for you the windows of heaven and pour down blessing on you, until there is more than enough.*<sup>v</sup>

And the LORD who found such great joy in the faith expressed by believers in the past – like the poor widow in the temple – has not changed. He still rejoices when we give generously to church and charity while trusting in his promises to provide us with all we need. He encourages us to test him on this, confident that He will keep His promises for Jesus' sake.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the LORD cares more about what moves you to place your offering on the plate rather than the amount itself. Jesus loves offerings that are given in faith – showing our trust in him as our Saviour from sin, who not only opened heaven to us but who continues to provide everything we need for our body and life. May the LORD increase our faith so that it mirrors that of the poor widow in the temple, who demonstrated her fear, love and trust in God by offering the LORD everything she had with the faith that He would take care of her. Such faith gives God great joy, and He graciously blesses those who exercise it. May the LORD grant us such faith as this. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Mathew 18:20 EHV

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 6:31-33 EHV

<sup>iii</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:9

<sup>iv</sup> Romans 8:32 EHV

<sup>v</sup> Malachi 3:10 EHV