

SEEING BEYOND OURSELVES

Mark 12:41-44

October 6, 2019

Pastor E. David Streets

Are you an easy mark with a soft heart? Are you one of those people who quickly gives when someone asks? Perhaps it's the Girl Scouts selling cookies or the Boy Scouts selling popcorn. Or maybe it's an athletic booster's club from the local high school. They call your phone. You answer even though you don't know the number. And they ask you if they can count on your support once again this year.

I try to support all those projects, especially if they involve children, students and sports. Why do I support them? Three reasons actually. I support them because:

1. I believe in their cause, in what they are trying to do.
2. I once stood where they are. I was once in their shoes. I sold stuff when I was a Boy Scout, I had kids that played hockey so they sold stuff to pay for ice time. I was President of the Hockey Club so I was always trying to raise funds to pay for coaches and ice time. I was a Boy Scout.
3. I support them because I was asked.

Actually, there's another reason why I give to these projects. I give because I can afford to do so. If I buy Girl Scout cookies or Boy Scout popcorn or if I buy a \$25.00 discount coupon pizza book for North Allegheny H.S. baseball, I won't go broke. I won't fail to provide for my family. I will still put food on our table and gas for my car and be able to buy my lunch whenever I want to do so. I can afford to be generous.

That last reason is why I am so fascinated by the story about the widow in our scripture lesson for today. It's not hard to remember this story. Jesus and his disciples are in the Temple seated near the offering box observing how various people are placing their offering in the collection boxes. Wealthy people are making significant gifts. Maybe they are giving so much that it takes a long time to stuff everything into the slot on the top of the box, one after another. Maybe they took pride in the fact that because they were wealthier, their coins were

heavier, more valuable, so everyone knew they gave more. Their coins made a bigger sound.

Then a widow came and put in two very small copper coins worth only a fraction of a penny. Listen to how Jesus' observation is recorded in the message.

The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford – she gave her all.

Mk. 12:43-44 MSG

You know what a widow is, don't you? It is a woman whose husband has died. A widower is a man whose wife has died. Let's think about widows for a moment. To lose your spouse is devastating. Married people never want to think about it happening to them. I can't even imagine how hard that must be to suddenly be alone.

Widows were especially important to Jesus. Everyone was and is important to Jesus, but widows were especially important because in Jesus day there was no one to watch out for them, no one to care for them. They were often linked together with orphans and in some cases considered a burden on society. They were frequently overlooked, usually neglected and always vulnerable.

Most widows shared a home with their husband while he was alive. He did his part, provided food, shelter, safety, and maybe an income. She cared for the home, prepared meals, cared for the children. Perhaps together they cared for a garden. But when she died she was all alone to do all of this on her own. Perhaps she was advancing in age and able to do less physically.

On top of this, she was a woman in a culture where women had less standing. Women weren't equal to men. They couldn't vote in communities. Their testimony was not valid in a court of law. Widows and their needs were usually ignored by society. They were not ignored by Jesus.

This widow had Jesus' attention, as did all widows. He was familiar with their circumstances. Apparently, he knew this woman personally because he said she gave all she had. Either that, or God was in his ear telling him all about her.

What does it mean, “She gave all she had?” Did she only give what she was carrying at the time, the total contents of her purse? Did she have something stashed away at home, as Dave Ramsey might have advised her? Was she giving out of what was left over after she had gone shopping and stocked her freezer with half a cow?

No. I think that when Jesus says she gave all she had that we can believe she gave all she had. She had nothing at home, nothing in a secret compartment in her purse, no private stash. So then, why did she do that? Why did she give the way that she gave? Why did she want to give the way she gave? I think there are 4 reasons.

1. She gave the way she did because she knew God. She knew about God. She was a Jew, raised in the Jewish tradition, so she learned about God at home. She believed in God. She knew that God had created the universe and everything in it. She knew that God had breathed life into each person at birth, including her. She knew that God was the ruler of the universe. Do you know God? Are you aware of his majesty, his power, his glory, his goodness, his grace and all he has given to you?

2. She gave the way she gave because she loved God. If she visited the Temple, it was to practice her faith, to be a faithful Jew. She attended, she listened, she learned. She would have heard the scriptures and been instructed in her faith. She learned the 10 Commandments, the first of which said of God, “You shall have no other Gods before me.” She would have these words committed to memory:

Hear oh Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. Deut. 6:4-5

So, she gave because she loved God. Do you love God?

3. She gave as she did because she was grateful to God for all that God had done for her. The Lord had given her life. The Lord had enabled her to be raised in a Jewish home. Jews knew that to be a profound blessing. The Lord had

provided her a husband, a home, probably children to raise, food to eat, shelter from danger.

Then her husband died. But God did not desert her. God remained by her side. God sustained her. God enabled her to endure. Perhaps God put people in her life to help her survive. She wasn't wealthy but she was finding her way in life and she knew God had a hand in that.

She gave as she gave because she was grateful. Are you grateful? Grateful to God for who you are, for what you have, and for the people you have in your life? Does that motivate you to respond favorably to God? Does it make you generous? Does your memory of what God has done for you over the long haul get lost when things don't go your way or you have a bad day?

4. She gave because she had confidence in God. She trusted God Do you trust God? She had lived by faith to some degree all of her life. God had been faithful to her, providing for her. All her life she had been taught to be faithful. When tragedy struck her life and she lost her husband, she was forced to rely upon God. She was forced to live by faith. God proved himself to be worthy of her trust. Is God worthy of your trust? Do you trust God in times of uncertainty and doubt? When you are afraid of what's ahead?

By giving as generously as she did, the widow demonstrated that she understood the importance of giving. She was raised in a culture that taught that all things come from God; that a tenth of what they possessed was to be returned to God through the Temple; that early in the life of Abraham he made a tithe gift to the high priest Melchizadek; that the prophet Malachi had reminded the people of God that when they failed to give a tithe to God that they were in fact, robbing God, and that if they returned to the practice of tithing that God would bless them profoundly

The widow understood all that. She chose to move beyond the legality of all those regulations and she gave all she had. Jesus said,

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extravagantly what she couldn't afford – she gave her all.

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She had confidence in God. She trusted God. She was steeped in a culture that understood that God was who he said he was; that God was and is faithful; that if God says he will do something, God will do it. She heard the story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son Issac, of Abraham binding his son, of Issac asking his father where was the ram for the sacrifice? Of Abraham knowing his son was the intended sacrifice and yet with a heavy yet hopeful and trusting heart he told Issac, “the Lord will provide.” As Abraham raised his hand to harm his child, God spoke. “Do not lay a hand on the child.” And there caught in the bushes was a ram for the sacrifice.

The widow knew that story. She knew that with God things are not always as they appear. That God can be trusted. That God always proves faithful. God had watched out for her to this point. He would continue to do so. So she gave because she had confidence in God.

Do you? Do you have confidence in God? Are you confident that our God who created the universe and everything in it including you and me is still in control? Are you able to trust God, that God cares about you, that God knows your circumstances and that God will not abandon you? Even if there are times when you wonder “where is God?” God is there. God always has your best interest at heart. Do you have enough faith to believe in God?

This is the first message in a 4 part series of messages about generosity. I will be with you all month. Each week the message will encourage us to consider another aspect of giving. Another reason why we give. I implore you to be here every week . We'll talk about giving consistently, proportionally, tithing and giving extravagantly. Sooner or later, we'll address where you are and where God might be leading you to go in your giving. Please come.

Today I want to address new believers, young Christians, people new to the faith or new to the Church or new to the practice of giving. I want to challenge you to decide today to give regularly, give consistently. If you don't give every time you come, decide today you are going to do so. If you don't know how much to give, start with \$5.00 every Sunday. Put it in an offering plate or give on line or

through text. Start there. Five dollars a week, the price of a caramel latte at Starbucks, a Big Mac and fries at MacDonalds.

If you are not yet a regular, weekly or monthly giver, make the decision to start today. Do it joyfully. Do it cheerfully. Do it because you want to, because you're grateful, because you love God. "The Lord loves a cheerful giver." If you are a regular giver, keep up the good work. I love your devotion to God and support for our Church. I'll be speaking directly to you next week. See you then, everyone. We'll continue next week.