

Sermon for October 11, 2015-20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost\*

Mark 12:41-44 (NIV84)

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

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

*<sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. <sup>43</sup> Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. <sup>44</sup> They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”*

Why do you give offerings to Church? Is it because God expects it of you? Is it because you are afraid you'd get kicked out of the congregation if you didn't? Is it so that you can feel good about yourself?

I think it is important for every Christian to reflect on the reason why he or she gives an offering to Church. Why? So that we don't make an offering for the reasons I listed above! The LORD hates those kinds of offerings. He wants our giving to reflect the love and trust we have in Him as our God who loved us so much that He gave up His one and only Son to save us all.

Let us then, with the example of the poor widow as our guide, learn 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: *Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury.* According to tradition, the temple had 13 trumpet shaped chests placed around the women's court. Nine of these chests were to receive offerings required by the Mosaic law. The other four were strictly for voluntary gifts. Our text seems to indicate that Jesus seated himself next to one of these free-will offering chests.

Jesus was keenly interested in what and how the people were offering. We can almost sense His omniscient gaze into the heart of every worshiper – seeing not only what he put into the chest, but why he put it there. Were these voluntary gifts given out of genuine love for the LORD or were they merely a hypocritical show of piety? Jesus knew the answer.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus once said: *“where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”* (Mat 18:20 NIV84) Just as he was with his disciples in the temple, so he is with us now; watching our worship and offerings with keen interest - searching our hands, mouths and hearts for genuine faith and love in him above all things.

In the temple Jesus saw: *Many rich people, [who] threw in large amounts.* I want to pause here for a moment, and say something positive about the Jews: it doesn't seem as if they gave the bare minimum required by the law. No, the Jews were happy to offer more to the LORD. Yes, it is true that many of them did it merely to make a show; and there were most likely those who tried to buy God's favor. Such offerings are sinful.

But notice that Jesus does not condemn the offerings of the rich in our sermon text, rather he places them in contrast with the far greater offering made by the poor widow – holding it as exemplary. This seems to indicate that there were some Jews who made offerings with the proper heart (namely out of love for their LORD) but not to the degree of faith that the widow had.

Yes, there are times we can learn from the generosity of the Jews, who, at the time of Moses, treasured God's house so much, that they had to be prevented from giving any more money and goods because that had already given so much! Oh that we would all have such a love for the LORD and his house.

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

We read: *But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.*

It seems as if no one other than Jesus noticed this poor widow, and yet she is definitely worthy of note. The fact that she carried around her entire life savings, seems to indicate 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 God's favor. No, she offered her two coins simply because she loved her Lord and trusted in his promise to forgive all her sins and provide all she needed in life.

Sadly there are some people who question whether or not the widow's sacrifice was all that great because our Bible says that the coins were worth only a fraction of a penny. What else could she do with so little money?

Actually, the money she gave was worth much more than a current US penny. It would've been enough to buy a couple eggs, milk or small pieces of bread. What she offered the Lord was her last meal – much like the widow of Zerahath when she used her little flour and oil to feed Elijah.

And so: *Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.*

Mark well what Jesus is telling his disciples: The small, insignificant offering made by this widow was more important than all the wealth of all the offerings given at the temple that day. Why? Jesus tells us:

*They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”*

The phrase “they all gave out of their wealth” seems to indicate that the money the other people offered was all money they didn’t really need. This woman, however, really needed the money she gave. It was a true sacrifice given out of love and faith in the Lord. Her offering was a testimony to the words Jesus spoke during his sermon on the Mount: *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* (Mat 6:31-33 NIV84)

“What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?” – these are the questions the Jews ask 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 try to answer these questions before we choose an offering to give to our LORD?

But that’s backwards. Our first priority ought to be the Lord. 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, he also sustains us by providing everything we need for our bodily life. The widow's offering proves that she believed this fact. Do the offerings we give to the Lord reveals such a faith in our heart?

The Lord once said: *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.* (Mat 16:24-25 NIV84) Don’t you see the widow doing exactly what Jesus described? She is denying herself her goods, taking up her cross of poverty, and following Christ’s promises in faith. This poor, widow is willing to lose her earthly life for her faith, but, by means of the faith she expressed with her offering, instead of losing her life, she found true eternal life in the Lord.

What happened to the widow after she made this offering? Did the Lord shower money down upon her from heaven? Probably not. I can imagine her remaining poor through out her earthly life. I can imagine that it was full of hardship and struggle. But I know for a fact that the Lord was with her – giving her all she needed to sustain her earthly life, and finally delivering her soul home to himself in heaven. There she is rich beyond measure. Why? All because of Christ’s sacrifice for her. All because of her faith which trusted in it.

Having meditated on the widow's offering, let us again ask ourselves: why do we give what we give to the Lord? Now, please understand the purpose of this question correctly. I am not asking

it in order to get more money in the offering plate. My greater concern is what is in our hearts. Do we, as the first commandment says, truly fear, love and trust in the Lord above all things? If we do, our actions – yes, even our giving - will show it.

But it's hard, isn't it? It's hard to trust that the Lord will take care of every aspect of our life to such a degree that we don't have to worry. It's hard giving money to church, when we are saving for something we really want. So I would venture to guess that none of us [myself included] have the faith of this widow, who gave everything she had to the LORD. Like the rest of the Jews, most of us give from our excess - offering the money we don't need - in weakness of faith.

But how can we change this? How can we strengthen our faith to such a degree that we may live and give as fearlessly as the poor widow did in the temple? The answer is this: meditate on God's promises while keeping your eyes fixed on the cross. And what will you see when you do this? You will see your God who loves you so much, that He sent His one and only Son to suffer and die for your sins so that you might live with him for ever in heaven. And if God, as St. Paul says, *did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* (Romans 8:32, NIV84)

Yes, as you meditate on the Scriptures through Christ's cross, you will see how God kept every promise He made – always providing everything that his dearly loved believers needed in order to deliver them safely through this earthly life to himself in heaven. No, their life wasn't always easy, but He was with them through it all – keeping his promises and glorifying his name.

Meditating on these facts strengthens our faith. It convinces us that our security and happiness is not found in how much money we have and what we do for ourselves, it's found in Christ alone. Faith in this truth moves us to action. It not only makes us *willing* to give, it moves us to *act* – to boldly sacrifice the wealth God has given us – trusting that He will keep his promises and provide for our every need.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: No matter what the amount, Jesus loves offerings that are given to him out of love for who He is and what He has done, and in the faith that He will provide all that we need. May the LORD increase our faith that it becomes like that of the poor widow who demonstrated her fear, love and trust in God by offering everything she had to the LORD with the faith that He would take care her. God is pleased by such a faith – blessing the person who shows it. Amen.