

SERMON January 20, 2019 To Be Like God
TEXT Mark 12:38-44 NRSV
SUBJECT Giving from the heart
THEME Our giving reflects our heart – whether pure, or self-focused.
PURPOSE To encourage trustful, faithful giving
PIC Widow giving at the Temple

A grandfather was out working in his yard. His 5-year-old grandson was with him. They were doing various things that needed to be done – cutting branches, moving limbs, climbing ladders – all of the typical yardwork that needs to be done from time to time.

Well, truthfully the grandfather was doing all of the work. The grandson was just getting in the way! As much as he wanted to help, he couldn't get up on the ladder with the loppers or carry very big branches. And the branches that he DID carry he didn't really pay attention to, so there was a trail between where he picked them up and where he almost put them into the pile by the side of the road. Grandpa would have a lot of raking to do later to clean it all up.

But the boy persisted. He wanted to help! And it was a hot day. So then he said, "Grandpa, can I go get you a glass of water?"

That actually sounded like a good idea. So the boy ran into the house to get the water.

BUT –

- He grabbed a dirty cup from the sink instead of a clean one;
- He accidently turned on the hot water instead of the cold;
- He stuck his fingers in the cup as he was running out with it, and got bits a leaves and mud into the cup as he brought it.



And Grandpa looks at that cup – warm, dirty, bits of leaf and orange juice swirling around in it –

And he looks at the face of his grandson – beaming, so excited that he could actually do something to help –

And what did he do?

He drank it straight down.

What is that point of that story? (TAKE ANSWERS)

I think the point is that ***NOTHING GIVEN TO GOD IS EVER WASTED.***

We have a story from the scripture today, about Jesus sitting the Temple, watching people give their gifts.

I wonder what the disciples were doing during this time. It seems a little odd to us to be watching people giving their offering. How would you feel if I walked along with the ushers during the offering time, and watched every single one of you to see how much you put into the plate?

Sounds a little weird and intimidating when you put it like that! So what was going on here?

First of all, we have to understand the difference between a TITHE and an OFFERING.

A TITHE was the 10% of your income that belonged to God; an OFFERING was what you gave ABOVE AND BEYOND your tithe!

Realistically, you couldn't give an offering if you hadn't given a tithe first!

In the Temple courtyard there were 13 boxes, called "shofaros". They probably looked something like this:



Each of these shofaros was for a different purpose. One was for the half-shekel Temple tax, one was for last year's half-shekel tax, one was for sin offerings, one was for praise offerings, several were designated to cover the cost of different consumables for the Temple (like wood, frankincense, gold for making new vessels, etc.), and six of them were for other various donations, including the 13th box, the voluntary donation.

I have here a very poor representation of a shofaros, but hopefully will help us to get the point –

These were designed with a horn, called a shofar, at the top to funnel in the money. You would put your coins in here, and they would travel down and there would be a bell or something down here that would make noise when the coins were deposited in the bottom. (SHOW HOW IT WORKS)

So you could come in and drop in a coin and it would make a (CLING) sound. You would know that your offering was received, and you could go on with your day.

But here's the interesting part – if you dropped in more coins, what would happen?

More clings! It would make more noise! More people would notice!

It is common practice to have our names in the program under “CHARITABLE BENEFACTORS” or up on the sides of the buildings. We have scholarships named after people that do a lot of good work.

But what Jesus was seeing here was a little more than that. It says He was watching the people put their offerings into these shofaros – observing how they gave.

Let's go back a little bit on this – earlier this week, according to Mark, Jesus had gone in and driven out the money-changers and overturned their tables, because He said they were defiling it by their commercialism and greed. There's a whole story behind that that I'll tell you sometime, but for now let's recognize that Jesus had a history here at the Temple. I'm sure that many people were watching him to see what He would do next.

At the beginning of our scripture this morning Jesus has some harsh words to say about the chief priests and scribes again.

Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

I wonder what happened at this point. Did the scribes he was talking about just pray all the louder and deliberately walk in front of Him to make their point?

You would think that they would be a little bit embarrassed that He had called them out like that, but I think it's the same as it is today – we ignore those who disagree with us, or we double-down just to make the point that we are right and they are wrong. If you don't believe me, just look at Washington. (Am I going to get into trouble here?) They are gridlocked because people start taking sides and convince themselves that the other side has nothing worth hearing.

I think this is what the scribes were doing. When Jesus criticizes them for their showy, ostentatious prayers, they did it all the louder!

Now – the shofaros:

Suppose you came to give your offering. You could be efficient about it and put in one silver coin – (DROP QUARTER)

But what is one of these worth? 25 cents. What if I turned this into pennies – what would it sound like then? (DROP 25 PENNIES)

Which one is more noticeable?

.....
I wonder if that's what Jesus saw. The rich were coming in to give their offerings – which was a good thing; they were used for good purposes.

(DROP LOTS OF COINS, SLOWLY)

But I wonder how many of them were making a show of it. Instead of just dropping one coin and moving on quietly, if they turned all of their coins into bronze, they could a lot more for their money, literally! (If they turned them into copper, they could get even more!)

So is this what was happening? People were turning an act of worship into an act of “Look at me”?

.....
The criticism that Jesus levels against the scribes was that they gave the appearances of being very faithful people, but behind the scenes they were more interested in themselves than in anyone else. He even calls them “devourers of widow's houses!”

In those days in Israel, a woman could not own property. If a woman's husband died and she had no sons, she (and her daughters, if she had any), would be thrown out onto the streets.

You could make a good sum, just by gathering up widow's homes and tossing them out and reselling them at a profit. It was legal. It could be done.

When my grandmother up in Jacksonville lost her husband, she carried on well for a while. Grandmother was always a brilliant woman – she earned her degree and was writing books and administrating schools back when most women weren't doing those kinds of things!

But as she didn't have as much focus on day-to-day things. As she got older, she would receive the tax bills on their property and would set them aside, intending to pay them, but she would forget about it and the property taxes didn't get paid.

Luckily, my dad and my aunt found out about it and quickly went and got everything set right, but they were only a few months away from my grandmother losing the house and the property because somebody else had taken over the tax lien and was intending to take the property away from her!

.....
That just makes me angry. How many of our older people lose their homes and their lives because our society values profit over people? How many of our veterans are suffering because of loopholes in the system?

Interesting that Jesus was talking about the scribes taking advantage of widows, and then a widow appears in front of them –

What is the message that Jesus is giving us today? Are we more interested in walking with God and being transformed into His image, or can we also get caught up in the sin of looking for the approval of others?

I am glad that we have decided to proceed with upgrading our facilities – to develop a welcoming entry space, to increase our bathrooms, to add showers – these are all good things, and I thank all of you that were able to attend last week and make the decision.

So now I want to precede to the next steps very carefully – forming a Building Committee, and raising the funds.

I want for us to be faithful in all of this. I want for us to be aware of how we raise the funds. We have some members here who can give a whole lot – we have some that could give the entire amount and not be worried about it!

But that wouldn't be healthy. Then it wouldn't be OUR project. This is OUR church – we need to do this TOGETHER!

.....
Every gift that is given is important. Whether someone gives \$1.5 million or they give \$150 – every gift is important! **God doesn't look at the size of the gift; God looks at the HEART behind the gift.**

We could talk about the difference in proportions – those who give of their extra fat versus those who give from tomorrow's meals. I mean, look at it – where did the widow get her money?

She couldn't hold a job. She didn't have an inheritance. The only thing she could do was to beg! She didn't have a bank account where she could go and write a check tomorrow to cover the groceries. These two copper coins were all that she had – if she was going to eat tomorrow, someone was going to have to give her something!

That's not wise investment – she should have hidden the money away so that she could buy bread without having to depend upon anyone tomorrow!

But did Jesus criticize her?
.....

I have a devotional book here that was given to me when I was first accepted the District Board of Ordained Ministry back in 1986. It is set up for daily readings and for a Sabbath day once a month.

There is a reading here I want to share with you about this passage that we have today – (READ FROM DEVOTIONAL)

.....
Our Lord is sitting by the Temple watching all the people coming and going, putting their offerings into the box. Some of them were making quite a show of it, no doubt, so that everyone would know how much they had put in. But there, among them all, was a little old lady, rather shabbily dressed, who slipped in her twopence half-penny when no one was looking. But the Lord saw her. And he got terribly excited about it. "She's put in more than all the rest put together!" he exclaims.

This little old lady did not realize that she was doing anything spectacular; nothing could have been further from her mind. She did not want to draw attention to herself, because she knew that what she was giving was not worth very much, it was not going to repair the Temple roof or get them a new organ or even pay for the Boy Scouts' Annual Outing. The Temple authorities might well think it was a confounded nuisance having to count all the small change put in by people like her. But she had given all she had, knowing that it was not much, knowing that she was not going to solve anyone's problems. And surely the Lord recognized in her a kindred spirit. She was doing the same kind of thing that he was doing. He was not solving the world's problems in any sense that the world could understand, he was not reforming society or abolishing poverty -- "The poor you will always have with you" was his comment on that ([Matthew 26:11](#)) -- he was not doing any of the things some modern Christians think he should have been doing. And many people considered him a nuisance. But he was giving himself, he was giving all he had got, he was giving his very life.

- Simon Tugwell, "Prayer"
.....

.....
I am not a "Prosperity Gospel" preacher – the kind who says, "Give, and God will give more back to you!"

I don't do that, because that's the wrong focus of giving. ***If I give because I think it will give me a good return on my investment, I don't really love God. I love things.***

But Jesus saw in this widow someone who was like Himself – giving whatever she had, because she believed that God had already blessed her, and now He could use her to bless someone else.

That's what our building project is going to be about – How can God use what we give to bless others? There's that old saying, "***Faith plants trees under whose shade it will never sit.***"

I hope you are all here when we get this building project completed! But what I pray for most is that we will not let this project distract us from daily faithful living. Reading with the children at Tommy Barfield Elementary – taking communion to our homebound members and visiting with them – setting up coffee and refreshments for those who come in seeking God’s face on Sunday mornings – housing relief workers – seeing each others’ faces in small groups.

Nothing given to God is ever wasted. Whether the gift is great or small, whether it’s finances or the time taken to teach someone who to speak English or how to balance a checkbook, whatever you offer in the name of Christ, Jesus sees it and all heaven is rejoicing!

³⁸ As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! ⁴⁰ They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ 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.”