

**“No Better Time”
Mark 12:41-44
Consecration Sunday
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**Pastor Joshua Sawyer
First Christian Church
Omaha, NE**

Our pericope today comes from the Gospel of Mark which is a gospel noted for portraying Jesus as the mighty miracle worker, not Jesus the wise teacher; although here in Mark chapter 12 the writer offers challenge and opportunity through Jesus the teacher instructing on the parable of the vineyard, paying taxes to Caesar, the resurrection, the great commandment and the widow.¹ According to the Gospel of Mark, the teaching we will be reading today was one of the last things Jesus shared with his disciples; before the Passover meal, where he was betrayed. It is known to most as the story of “The Widow’s Mite”. Before we read the scripture passage I would like for us to look at some of the portrayals painters have created of this story in order to imagine the situation more clearly in our own mind’s eye.

Our first picture is by Daniel Bonnell. The picture here, as I see it, depicts the anonymity of the widow. There are no distinct facial features, no differences in attire, each person in the room, besides the three onlookers illuminated by the tunneled light, is seemingly on their way to give all they have.

Our next slide provides three alternative visions: 1) a young woman with three children putting those small coins in the offering; 2) an older woman, alone, with the two coins; and 3) a bronze sculpture of our widow, young, alone, with one hand upon her heart and another reaching out to give all that she has to offer.

Of all the images I saw this week, I am most drawn to our next portrayal of our story. Here, the beautiful woman seems to glisten in the center while the wealthy in their colorful robes around her don’t even notice the sacrifice she is making. The coins she holds do not compare in the slightest to the offerings that they have made.

The amount may have been small: two copper coins known as mites or leptons. Much smaller than a penny, identifiable by the picture of the blooming lotus scepter on one side and the star of eight rays on the other; the worth of these coins has been said to have been about 6 minutes of an average daily wage. I have a feeling that minimum wage was much less than what we enjoy here in Nebraska. Perhaps it was closer to what most of the rest of the world lives off of on a regular basis.

As we read our scripture let us imagine the scene and the scandal which was taking place...

Reading: Mark 12:41-44

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 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. 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.'

Prayer

The story of the widow's mite is often heard in the context of stewardship season because of its beautiful depiction of the woman modeling sacrificial giving. Her example acknowledges that we all have something to give, reminds us that God sees beyond the sum we offer but directly to our heart. This is partially why the text was selected for our Stewardship series: The Giving Tree.

For at its best it debunks the myths we have talked about the last couple of weeks: that we can wait to give until we are older or that we should not pledge because we might not be able to fulfill our pledge. This passage taken at its best is a picture of complete trust of the provisions of God and the dependability of the religious institutions. It depicts a widow, the most vulnerable in society giving her first fruits to a cause bigger than herself for the benefit of not merely herself but for all in need.

Of course, this may not be the first thought that comes to mind during stewardship season. Perhaps you envisioned Rene, Rick, or myself preparing to shake your money tree. Our own Stephen Toller said when he hears that it is stewardship season he thinks that the church is ready to ask how much money they want. I would add to this that often we think how much of OUR money the church wants.

If this is more of the idea that you get when you hear it is stewardship season then I would like to take a moment to clear the air. Stewardship season is not about some membership dues, about running off with your hard earned cash, about making martyrs or keeping people poor. Stewardship season is a yearly reminder that life does not happen alone; that the church is a place where we can gather to worship the living God. Where we can celebrate new life, join together for weddings; mourn the passing of our saints; where we can help those who have been

considered outcast, bind up the wounds of the broken hearted. Stewardship is a reminder of what St. Ambrose said: “That we should not allow our possessions to possess us.” Or, as Bawn replied on Facebook, “I think sometimes that possessions get in the way of really seeing God at work in our lives. Live simply, love more, and enjoy God.”

What if our perspectives about money in particular just needed to change a little bit?

I think that part of this change of perspective is a move from what Rick described to me this week as a mindset of scarcity to a mindset of abundance. Have you ever been around a person who lives in a reality dictated by scarcity? How does it differ from someone who lives in a reality dictated by abundance?

A seminary professor of mine once mentioned to me how scared he was to have a second child. He was worried because he loved his first child so much that he was concerned he wouldn't have enough love to give to another child. A part of him knew that this thinking was silly: that there really are no limits on the ability of humans to share love; but another part of him knew that the evidence of his love seemed limited on a daily basis with those whom he came in contact with.

Once we make this move from scarcity to abundance, I think we can begin to live lives of generosity; we can begin to appreciate the gifts we have been given; see life as a gift meant to be shared. Let the generosity revolution begin. There is no better time...Amen.

ⁱ David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word (Year B, Vol. 4)* John Knox Press: Louisville, KY (PG. 285)