

“Stepping Up”

Mark 12:38-44

March 5, 2017

There is an old joke about a pig and a chicken walking down a road together when they saw a sign in front of a church that read, “Breakfast and Bazaar this Saturday. Ham and eggs will be served from 6:30 to 8:30am.” The chicken turned to the pig and said, “See even we can help the church.” “Yes,” said the pig, “but your gift is only a contribution, mine is a sacrifice.”

Giving to God with your time, talents, and treasures really is very exciting. In fact, whenever we give to others we usually feel very good; but when you make the commitment to step in to the process of giving God your best on a regular basis, that’s a great feeling. Sometimes, though, we are challenged to give in a sacrificial way – above and beyond what we normally give, and that’s what our “Building To Serve” campaign has been about – stepping up and giving sacrificially so that the body of Christ may be built up and strengthened for service to others. Giving to God is always about trust. Do you trust Him to provide and care for you?

In our Gospel lesson for today we see a poor widow who demonstrated her trust in God through her giving. In this text we see Jesus sitting in the outer courtyard of the temple in Jerusalem with His disciples watching people as they put their offerings into these large receptacles. Bible commentaries tell us that there were 13 of these receptacles in the courtyard. Now to get an understanding of this, imagine that our narthex/lobby area is the courtyard. The way this would be set up is in the middle of our narthex there would be a large box for people who make large donations to the church. We could say that this would be for people who donate \$10,000 or more to the church. Then near the doors to the sanctuary there would be some boxes for those who give \$1000-\$10,000 to the church. On the sides of the narthex there would be boxes for those who give \$500-\$1000; against the back wall under the stained glass window would be boxes for smaller amounts; and finally near the front doors there would be a box for those who give almost nothing to the church. People giving \$10,000 or more were feeling very good. Jesus is watching and they know it, so they are feeling very proud. But while these people were taking great pride in what they were giving, they were losing their perspective. Then along comes a poor widow and she goes to her box and puts in two small coins, which make a penny. Again, Jesus is watching and upon seeing this Jesus says to His disciples in Verses 43-44, “This poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Why does Jesus praise her? What is different about her giving? What makes her giving unusual? I’m sure the disciples had to be a little confused, wondering: “How did she give more than the others?” This widow gave every penny she had to her name, she gave everything she had to live on. Keep in mind that the widows in the days of Scripture were the lowest class of citizens. There were no government programs to care for them, their husbands did not leave behind retirement accounts from their jobs, so they were dependent on the generosity of people in order to simply survive. And yet, she put in the box all that she had.

Now I’m sure she realized that those coins were not going to get her anywhere, they were useless. If we only had 2 pennies to our name, would that help us to survive in any way? No, 2 pennies are worthless to us. But this widow gave all that she had, because it was the one way she could respond to God’s blessings in her life. She knew that she was totally dependent on God to care for her, and we are in the same situation. If we believe that what we have, our income and our possessions, is going to provide what we need to live, then we are completely mistaken. That was the mentality of those rich people who were giving their big gifts and laughing at the widow who gave her two small coins. We do not survive based on what we have or who we are, we are completely dependent on God and unless we understand that we are going to struggle with trusting God.

When Jesus looked into the heart of that widow, He saw that she not only loved Him, but she trusted Him. Do we trust Jesus when it comes to our giving? This is the one area where God tells us, in the book of Malachi, to test Him and you will see that He is faithful. God doesn’t say to test Him in anything else other than giving. Test Him and you will see that He provides.

Have you ever watched a child when it comes to the offering in the church? They are excited as the offering plates get passed around. This is the one part of the worship service where they can actively participate. They can’t wait to put their envelope or their nickels, quarters, or dollar in the plate. They give joyfully – they are excited – and that’s the way God wants it to be for us.

This widow had faith, but the Bible also says that faith without words is dead. So as Jesus looked at her heart and saw her love for Him, He also looked at her hands, and in her hands was her offering. Jesus cared about her works, what she gave – not the amount, but what the amount represented – her love for Him.

Can you relate to this widow? Meaning, can you relate to giving generously to God and trusting Him then to provide for you? Often times we give sacrificially to our children and our families, and we do it joyfully. Do we ever regret giving them nice gifts? No, just the opposite, we often wish we could give them more. Why? Because we love them. So, if we love God, then we should delight in giving generously to Him. I do not believe God is calling any of us to give Him all of our money. God is not calling anyone to become poor. But since God gives us our money, time, and talents, He simply wants us to give a portion back to Him in response to what He has done for us.

I would like you to hear from one of the widows in our congregation who understands what it means to depend on God to meet all of her needs. Theresa Harrell and her husband, Buzz, joined our church several years ago and in 2011 Buzz died rather suddenly. I would like Theresa to come forward to tell you about how God cared for her in the midst of great uncertainty.

I have never met anyone who ever regretted giving to God. Just the opposite. Every person I have ever met who gives God their best, out of love, feels good about it. God promises to meet all of our needs and the question then is do we believe that, do we believe God? Our giving at the church and especially in this “Building To Serve” campaign is based on the biblical idea of “equal sacrifice, not equal gifts,” and this story backs up that concept. So as you consider your giving and in particular stepping up to make a sacrificial gift, I encourage you to remember two things: 1) Give Completely. I am not saying to give everything you have or to make yourself poor. Give completely in trust to God. Do not give out of guilt, fear, or because you think you have to. Give out of love for God. 2) Give Memorably. When we fill out these yellow commitment cards, we will be taking a leap of faith and saying to God, “Lord, I’m trusting you.” But we are also making a pledge to one another saying that we are in this ministry together as we bring these cards to worship March 19. The church is not a building, the church is people. We are the church and the church we build today I believe determines the church we are tomorrow. So I encourage you over the next few weeks to think about the priorities you set and the witness you give to your family and others when you trust God completely.