

What We are Building and Why it Matters  
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Mark 12:38-44  
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*Loving God, you are the source of all life and your faithfulness endures to all generations. In this time of prayerful reflection, open our ears to hear your word and know your voice. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, that we may lovingly and humbly serve you, now and always. Amen*

It was a spectacular summer's day! Picture postcard perfect. A great day to be outside, and an even better day for some ice cream. That was my thought as I took an afternoon break and made a bee-line over to the local parlor known for its delicious home-made creations.

Upon arrival, there was no need to look at the countless varieties; my craving for chocolate chip was unmistakable. When it was finally my turn to order, I watched as the young man behind the counter scooped out generous portions of be-speckled delight causing me to wonder if he heard me say *small* when asked for my desired portion! "Oh well," I thought, "you only live once and it is such a lovely day!"

Exchanging my Visa card for a top-heavy cone, I then rummaged through my wallet with my free hand to find a dollar because I had noticed the strategically placed glass tip jar on the counter. It was a jar covered in the names of the employees and their various schools of higher learning, all to enhance a spirit of generosity no doubt! Quickly I pushed the bill I grabbed into the mouth of the jar so I could sign the receipt while taking a quick bite of the delicious frozen treat; I just couldn't wait! Life was good!

Then, things took a turn as I made my way out of the parlor into the heat of the day. I am not exactly sure why I thought to look again into my wallet but upon doing so I realized my mistake. Turning quickly, I looked back toward the counter, over the heads of the little patrons, where I could clearly see the glass tip jar with a crisp \$100 bill sitting on top.

God has a sense of humor. Of this there is not a doubt! But on this particular day, I couldn't help but feel it was decidedly not the Good Humor type! So I stood there in the sun with melting ice cream dripping onto my hand, puzzling and puzzling until my puzzler was sore. How did this happen? Why wasn't I more careful? What was I to do now?

Deciding it would be particularly poor form for the local pastor to be seen diving into tip jar to retrieve said bill. I concluded, albeit reluctantly, that my C Note found a better home in the jar, for those deserving students, rather than my now lightened wallet.

So, on this Consecration Sunday, that is one model of how to give. You heard tell of the Joyful Giver? Well, that memorable afternoon, I was the Unintentional Giver! The result of too much multi-tasking and an over-active sweet tooth!

Thankfully, in our Lectionary Text this morning, we heard a very different tale of giving, one born out of a generous spirit, the story of the widow's mite. From our passage we learned that Jesus and his disciples were sitting across from the Temple Treasury. The Treasury was a collection station for the faithful to place their offerings, which they did by placing their coins into a trumpet like opening. Jesus watched as the people filed past during their Ritual of Giving.

While watching, Jesus noticed something about how people gave their offering. Apparently, some were there to make a grand statement that mirrored the way they acted in the rest life; lives centered on a selfish desire to be seen and known as more special than the rest. They were giving for the wrong reasons, while the poor widow humbly and quietly gave what can only be seen as a sacrificial gift. It wasn't much by the world's estimation, just two pennies, but to Jesus it was everything. Jesus points out to the disciples that such true generosity shown by this old widow, a person of little or no status in that society, was the example for all to follow.

“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,” and then he adds these memorable words, “all she had to live on.”

Do you, like I, find yourself pondering? Why did she do it? Why did she give so abundantly? She obviously didn't have a lot to spare? Was it a mistake?

Or, was her remarkable gift the product of many days of prayerful discernment? A gift reflecting a faithful awareness that though poor now, her life was filled with many blessings along the way, and so she had to give back everything she could as a sign of deep gratitude for her life and a deep love for her God?

Or, was her gift the natural result of a life dedicated to a grace-filled giving. Was it reflective of a Spirit that generously gave without thought for reward? Was it in keeping with all the other ways that she gave of her time, her love, and her life? A life made rich by her generous concern for those around her?

Or, was her gift the joy-filled result of appreciation for all the ways her community of faith touched hearts and changed lives, including her own? It is interesting to consider what motivated this woman who had so little to give and yet provided the very model of generous faithful giving for centuries of followers. It is good to reflect on how we might follow her example now.

In a moment, we will be invited to take part in our Ritual of Giving. We will come forward to place our pledges of support for this ministry in the Chancel for God's blessing. It is a time-honored tradition that members of Congregational Churches have done for centuries.

Before we do, it is good to remind ourselves why we do it and why it matters.

As you know, we have been speaking for the past couple of months about our desire to build a church for all generations. A ministry where everyone is honored and connections are made that are true and deep and real, with one another and with our loving God. This has been a theme that has resonated well with many, because there is a deep need out there, one that this church is able to fill. And I believe, called to answer!

Cameron Trimble, a highly respected church consultant who spoke last September at our Conference's Annual Meeting says, "It is the speed of our culture that is actually ripping apart the relational fabric that holds us together as a humanity, as a society. And it has infused in our culture a level of chaos that we are not designed to live in nor prepared to lead in. And the great challenge for us is that this is not going to change." Do you agree? I do. But hope is not lost!

Cameron goes on to say that in all of society only, “faith communities are designed specifically to bring relationships together.” That is our call! To be a church for all Generations. Because it is deeply needed and because it matters.

A few weeks ago, Liz Gill stood before you to say with passion and eloquence, “If I had known then that a Christian community could be an open and affirming congregation, accepting of all who want to be here regardless of anything! I’d have come sooner. If I had known that when I asked my kids where their favorite all-time places to be are, and their response was an immediate, ‘Home and Church, Mom’, I’d have come sooner. I didn’t know Church was missing from my life until that day 5 years ago when I walked into this building. “

Then Liz lifted up a reality I hold dear in my heart, “And I believe there are MANY families like mine, who don’t know there is a loving, supportive, accepting, progressive community inside these walls.” I believe this lies at the very foundation of our call as a congregation who cares.

Last week, Emmy Lyndsay stood before you in the middle of this Chancel last week, and powerfully preached that there are too many people out there who do not believe there are any Christian communities that embrace everyone and that lift up a faith that is informed and open and filled with life-giving love and support. They have no idea that such a church as this one exists! Especially the young people. (I am speaking of several generations of young people from 45 on down!) That is why we need to do all that we can to bring the Good News of our faith to all of God’s children of every age.

So, people of faith...

If you are pledging to give out of a generous heart as a statement for the ways you have been blessed... Thank you!

If you plan to give as a statement of support for all the ways that this household of faith makes a difference in the world... Thank you!

If you plan to give what you can and hope to model your life as one centered on faithful service to those around you... Thank you!

Yes, it is a wonderful day to come together as God’s people as a sign of our gratitude and as a way to Build a Church for All Generations! Give with a glad heart, generously and joyfully my friends, for there can be no mistake that such a ministry as our does matter!

Blessing:

Loving God, bless these pledges of support and everyone who is gathered here, that your will for this world may be made known in our work and in our lives. Guide us as a community of faith, as we do our best to make a difference in this beautiful, and yet fragile, and too often violent world, so more may know of your love and grace. Bless this ministry that it may reflect the life and ministry of Jesus in whom we do our best to follow.

And now as we gather as a grateful congregation for all the ways you have blessed us we give you our thanks: For food in a world where many are in hunger; For faith in a world where many walk in fear; For friends in a world where many walk alone; We give you thanks, Loving God, and ask you to bless this time of fellowship in this time of celebration. Amen.

Mark 12:38-44

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, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

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.”