

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.'

Luke 21:1-4

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.'

“The Mighty Mite”**Rev. Charles Schuster****November 7, 2010**

Yogi Berra has written a book. Its title is one of his famous sayings, and appropriate as we approach our subject today. The title of Yogi's book is, "You Can Observe a Lot by Looking." We reach out to a world in need. We reach in to the depths of our soul. We reach up to the heights of our imagination. Next three weeks, we're going to think about our reach, how far it goes, how much it does, and how hard it is. And for the next three weeks we're going to explore the meaning and importance of a very brief episode in Jesus' life, because you can observe a lot by watching, and he did. Sitting near the altar, or one of the texts says standing in place, watching, a poor widow put in a coin on the altar, a lepta, copper coins, two coins, each half a cent. One cent. She reached out to a world in need, and he saw her do it.

Did he know her? Was she a friend? He knew the struggle single parents have. He know about widows. His mother was one. Mary was a single parent. Mary was a widow. We find nothing in the Bible about Joseph after Jesus was twelve years old. Most scholars believe that Joseph died young. Mary was a widow. Maybe she knew the woman who came to the temple that day. Maybe Jesus knew her. Anyway, Jesus watched the poor widow and the two coins and the rest is history, or Scripture. This morning, I'd like to invite you to join me as we think through what it means to give to the church and to those causes in which we believe. Because on the third Sunday of this month, we're going to be invited to reach out. And to do that, on Commitment Sunday, as we make our pledges, our promises for the church, for its future, as Jesus was inspired by the widow's mite put on the altar. The poor widow, the gift she gave, and how that speaks to us, because we too can observe a lot by looking.

The widow's gift--what does it mean? The mite. The mighty mite. The story proves it. First of all, and we know it, it isn't the size of the gift, it's what's in the heart of the giver. I don't know if it was a bumper sticker or I saw it on a shirt. It said, "I started out with nothing, and I still have most of it left." Sad thing about that is, to assume we have nothing to give is to overlook the power of the mighty mite, and to miss the point of what Jesus made clear in the economy of God. The size of the gift doesn't matter, just the heart of the giver, and no gift, given in love, is ever small. The widow's mite is mighty. A ripple can start a wave. A push can lead to a movement, moving ahead. A whisper can lead to a sound, and a sound can become a song. And a piece of bread can become the body of Christ and a cup of wine can become the relationship with God, and that can hold the church together, and it did. A laugh can stop a reign of terror.

Rebecca Dolan is a pastor. She's a United Methodist pastor in New York. She writes about a member of her church. "It was Sunday before Christmas. A member of the church showed up early for worship. His life was profoundly influenced by mental illness, and he often came early to talk to people and to instruct me on things. We all loved him, but sometimes when I heard his voice in the hallway, I would scurry off in another direction because I didn't want to get caught in an endless monologue. 'Rebecca', he yelled across the sanctuary. 'Pastor Rebecca! You would not believe my good luck this morning!' I had to respond, but I thought to myself, "and I can't believe my bad luck being trapped in a conversation with you for ten minutes before worship starts." "Oh, tell me about it," I said in my pastoral voice. He began to describe in great detail his walk to the church. I looked at my watch. Finally he told me that when he was near the church, he looked down, and there on the sidewalk was a quarter, and he showed it to me. "I couldn't believe it," he said. "Can you imagine my luck? I think the Lord must have put it there for me to find on Sunday morning." "Wonderful," I said. "What are you going to do with it?" "Are you kidding?" he said. "I'm going to put it in the offering plate. That quarter belongs to Jesus. He's the one that helped me find it." It's never the size of the gift. Always the heart of the giver.

The first congregation I had on my own, solo pastor, it was a church in Thornton, Colorado. Interesting church. The loan from the Conference that got the church built was announced as paid off because a mistake was made at the Conference office and the church members burned the mortgage before the bureaucrats found the problem, and that happened in June. I was appointed there the first of July, 1974. At the end of July the church had a fire on the date of the funeral of one of its former pastors. Speculation was, one of the former church members tried to burn the church down. I've told you that before. When I called the bishop's office to tell them that the church I was appointed to now was condemned, and get me out of there, I was told, "No, you've got to stay and work with those people. And by the way, the bishop wants me to let you know that we told you to build a fire under those people, but that isn't what we had in mind." I've told you that before.

Every month was a financial struggle. We got into November that year, and we'd had our pledge campaign, and we were beginning to make some progress financially, and then the church treasurer came in and said she realized she had made a mistake in the books, and we were in serious deficit, and maybe we ought to just give up. There was an administrative board meeting, it was an official meeting, and Bess, that's when she spoke up, she took over the meeting. Bess was a member of the church. She had been a member of the church since it formed, and she lived across the street from the church, and she said, "Our children have made pledges to this church, and I added up their pledges, and you know, it's a little over a thousand dollars that they have pledged. Our kids believe in our church, and it's about time we started believing in it." That turned that church around. Our children believe in our future, it's about time we did. The next four years, that church paid off all of its bills. It paid its Wider Mission Conference apportionments one hundred per cent. Lots of churches couldn't do that. We struggled to do it, but we did. Young families joined. It reached out in mission. The church realized that if the children could believe in us, maybe we could ourselves.

This church is like that, I think. I don't know what people pledge, and I don't know what people give. But I know what's in your heart. I know the soul of this place. I know the spirit. I know you give a darn, as you give a dollar. Like the widow and her mite, the mighty mite. The size of the gift and the heart of the give. Before we give, we believe in it. But before we fill out our pledge cards, we take the time to count our blessings, and then to invest in what matters to us. That's what we do, here.

Paula Poundstone was right when she said, "Adults are always asking kids what they want to be when they grow up, because we're trying to get some ideas." Because we're trying to remember what it was like when we were children, and we were small, and we were told that our gifts that we gave were big. The size of the gift. The heart of the giver.

Secondly, you can observe a lot by looking. The widow knew it. We don't get to keep what we hoard. If we become preoccupied with holding on to what we have, it isn't ours. Holding onto what we have can make us behave in strange ways. It can happen to anybody. It can happen to church workers as well. I don't know where I came across this story, and I don't know if it's true, but it could be. A man called a church one day, and the church secretary answered the phone. "I want to speak to the head hog at the trough." She answered, "Sir, if you mean our pastor, you will need to treat him with more respect. We often refer to him as the Reverend. Sometimes we call him Pastor. In fact, he has an earned doctoral degree. Many of us refer to him as Doctor. But you cannot, you simply must not, refer to our beloved spiritual leader as the head hog at the trough." "I understand," the caller said. I was trying to get in touch with your pastor because I have ten thousand dollars and I was thinking of donating it to the building fund." There was a long pause, and the church secretary said, "Hold on just a minute. I think the big pig just walked in the door."

Holding on to what we have makes us act strange. It's an obsession, or it can be. It can become an addiction. If we live our lives to save our money, we will sell our souls. In the economy of God, what we own will own us. Of course we want to protect what we have. Of course we will need to invest it, and be wise in the way we handle it. Of course we must prepare for retirement years. Of course we want to leave something for our children or our grandchildren. But Jesus knew what the widow knew, and what we all have discovered. We can't take it with us. Or, as Billy Graham said years ago, there is no U-Haul behind a hearse. And Jesus spoke in parables about people who accumulate stuff and put it in barns. He spoke about what happens when we take our treasure and hide it. He spoke of how we lay up treasures and they can be destroyed by moth and fire and flood, and where our heart is, that's where our treasure is.

I've watched people bring in their precious treasures, like that chair I've been sitting in, to the church for this auction. People in this church have brought in beautiful items that come from the heart. I mean, they're precious items. This event in a week is not a rummage sale or an exchange of junk. People are giving things of value for their church. Priceless items. Sentimental worth. When it comes to giving, two truths. The size of the gift isn't as important as the heart of the giver. Secondly, if we hoard it, we lost it.

Thirdly, Susan Baker, Shelbyville Kentucky, found a puppy, wandered onto the porch. Her husband was assigned the task of putting an ad in the newspaper. He wrote, first, "Golden lab male, nine months old approximately, no collar, very friendly, found on Rock Ridge Road." Susan was worried the detail would bring the wrong people. Not the real owner. She asked him to abbreviate the ad. He did. He wrote another ad. She said it said too much. He wrote a third ad. She sent it back to him. Make it shorter, less specific. Probably an unusual thing for a husband, but he was getting frustrated with the editorial rejections. But he did continue to trim the wording, and finally what he sent in to the newspaper, which was printed, it said, "Guess what I found."

Guess what we know. Or will learn some day. The mighty mite, the widow. Guess what she found. The gift to the temple was a gift to God. It was her cause. She reached out beyond herself. We've got to have a cause, because it's the only thing that lasts. It was written on the bumper of a car, or maybe the front of a shirt, and it's true. It said, "Inside every old person is a young person wondering what happened." That's what I thought when I looked at the picture that's going to be in our church directory. And I know I'm not the only person who's thought that, because I've

heard other people say it. Young people probably haven't, this isn't a factor unless there has been a close call or a near death. For young people, it's one day that follows another, and there's not a lot of thought about the number of days left and what we will leave when we leave this world. But there comes a time in life, and it varies, I think. There comes a time in life when we kind of think about our years and we add them up or count them down, and think about life, and ponder what is its sum total? Some of us were shocked to see our directory photo as it came back on the computer screen. Our pictures do not look anything like we thought we looked. And we ask, "Where have the years gone?" Or we ask, "What have the years meant?" or even "What do we leave behind?" What do we leave behind?

Stephen Covey in his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* writes this, which I think is very spiritual. He tells us, "Begin with the end in mind." Begin with the end in mind. Think about your funeral. What do you want people to say about you? It matters not at all what you're worth, how many times your name has been in the newspaper for a good reason. Those things never last. But what cause did you promote, or how did you leave the world a better place? There will be evidence, telltale signs. Last Sunday night we went to the Halloween concert at the music school at CSU at 11:00. Performers dressed up in Halloween costumes. Two of the performers belonged to us, Romi Cho and A. J. Bush. Two of ours performed.

We have a dog, a cocker spaniel. We left him in the house and we told him specifically, "Stay off the bed." He's not to be on the bed. When we came home, he looked guilty, like he'd done something wrong, and when we went to the back bedroom, we were surprised to find the TV set turned on. The remote was on the bed. Toby sat on the remote control, and turned on the television, and he didn't know how to turn it off. It was evidence of his action. It was something he couldn't undo, like it is for us while we live. What will we do, and when we die, what will what we do keep on doing? What will we leave on after we're gone?

We don't know if Jesus was a friend of the widow at the temple. Could have been. We don't know anything about her net worth, but we do know what she did. We know how he noticed her and what she gave. She gave everything she had. She gave everything she had. She gave it to the temple. She gave it because she believed that some good would be done because of it. She leveraged her lepta. She invested her mite into something bigger than herself, and it became her cause, and she gave it all, and Jesus noticed. It was evidence of a good life. I wonder what inspired him to give his life? Was it the widow who gave all she had? Was she the example for him that inspired him to be the example for us? I think so. We become part of a cause, because we know we will not live forever, and we have a choice, and the choice is, can we live for nothing, or we can die for something we believe in.

Andrew Young has had an interesting life. Civil rights leader, working with Martin Luther King. African-American. He was a congressman. He was our ambassador to the United Nations, he was the mayor of Atlanta, he's an ordained minister. And one day his youngest daughter came and told him that she had heard a missionary speak and she wanted to go to Uganda. He told her it was dangerous. She said God had called her. He told her that she could be hurt. She said to him, "I could be hurt in Atlanta." She said, "You could be killed. We're all going to die some time." Well Andrew Young thought about it and gave her his blessing. When he took her to the airport, on the way back he thought, "When my daughter walked into that airplane, I realized that in baptizing her, what I said I wanted most for her was that she would become a respectable Christian. I simply was not prepared for her to become a real one."

In God's economy, a real Christian is not concerned with what we have, but how we use it for good. A real Christian knows that life is to be spent, not saved. A real Christian finds a cause and

lives it. In God's economy, we keep what we give, and what remains is the good we leave behind that will outlive us. It means we age, and the wrinkles on our faces are caused by the causes that concern us, and they should appear in the church directory, no matter how hard the photographer and Botox try to remove them. It means the limp in our step is not arthritis's grip on our hip, but it's counting up the steps we have taken to support those things we believe in, and to walk or run into harm's way, because we must. It means even if they put a plaque on the wall with our name on it, some day the wall will come down, but the cause we gave ourselves to, it will last. It means giving is not an obligation but an honor, and we are pleased to be able to share what is ours because in the economy of God's grace, grace is everything, and what we have is coming to us on loan. And life is about finding a way to pay it off. The mighty mite, the poor widow. Jesus saw her reach out. She taught him. He told us. Before you give a dollar, give a darn. And if you bury a treasure, you'll blow it.

No gift is too small if the heart is pure. You do not own what owns you. We cannot keep what we hoard. And the only thing that really matters is what we leave behind. Find a cause, because that's all there is. At least that's what I think. My two cents' worth, which I'll leave up here on the pulpit for you to pick up. But maybe you've seen it. I think you have, and you know it. You know, you can observe a lot by watching, as he watched the poor widow, as we watched her with him.