**Sermon Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost, November 10, 2024, Mark 12: 38-44 Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lancaster, Pa. Rev. Timothy W. Sadler**

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The story of the widow and her offering is a short one. We’re sailing along thorough the Gospel of Mark, watching Jesus deal with the religious leaders head-on, and suddenly, there’s these few short verses stuck in there...about this widow who may be the biggest contributor to the treasury because she gave what she couldn’t afford to give.

One of the things that helps us to understand what’s going on are the verses that come before this lesson. Jesus is asked which commandment is the most important, and He takes all the Law, all the prophets—He takes all of Scripture----and zeros into the heart of God’s Word:

“The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

Now that just about covers everything. But in case anybody’s missed it, Jesus goes on to say:

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” And for those who are still having a little trouble processing, Jesus drives it home: “There is no commandment greater than these.”

After this teaching and right before the story of the widow, Jesus denounces certain religious leaders because they don’t practice what they preach; they like to make a show of their faith, but when it comes to living it out where it really counts—

In the nitty gritty reality of daily life...they show a total lack of compassion to those in need. In fact, they show an incredible willingness to walk all over people in need, so that they can maintain the status quo of their wealth and position.

Wrong thing to do, because Jesus is ALWAYS concerned about people in need. These religious leaders walk a very fine line with their hypocrisy. And the worst thing about their total lack of compassion, is that it sends the wrong message about the God they say they worship....

About the God they represent...about the God who—if He is anything—is at very least, a God of compassion and mercy.

Right after Jesus’ words of condemnation, about the religious leaders, we come to the story of the widow, and we have to wonder why what the widow did was so important that Jesus lifted it up as a teaching, and it’s included in the Gospel. We have to wonder what made it so important.

Could it be, I wonder, that this simple act of an unknown woman made the teaching of Jesus about loving God and loving neighbor come blazingly to life? Could she be a living example of a living and vital faith?

The widow’s gift didn’t mean she was going to have to go without some luxuries for a day or two; her gift put her life in jeopardy, because a widow in this society without resources was extremely vulnerable.

You don’t make a choice like that unless it means something to you.

There must have been a lot of money coming into the temple treasury. It says that many rich people put in large sums. The temple certainly didn’t need the widow’s puny offering in order to survive.

Maybe the widow understood a deeper truth. Maybe she wasn’t giving to sustain the temple—that sort of gets everything turned around backwards. Maybe she was giving because the people of God are called to love God completely and totally...

And we show that love by doing something that will help the neighbor, something that will be a living example to the neighbor, of the incredible love and mercy of God.

If we take away from our offerings, and we give in order to sustain a building or a program or anything, no matter how wonderful or good that building or program is, then we stand in danger of having our giving become meaningless...

If the building or program doesn’t go the way we think it should. Any giving that we do—whether it’s a monetary offering or an offering of our time—must be done because we love Jesus above everything else in our lives.

And then—as a congregation—we make certain that those offerings go beyond these walls, so that those in this community and throughout the world, will also get a clear message that the God who created them is guiding His people in love...to reach out in mercy to touch their pain and confusion.

Our love for God, which deepens and grows the more we realize how much He has done for us and continues to do—our love for God is to be the reason we worship, we work, we give, we play, we live, we breathe.

There can be no other starting point—no other standard—for us.

Maybe the widow’s offering is the kind of offering that makes a difference in the Kingdom of God because it made a difference in HER life. It was an offering that required something of her.

At the very least, she certainly would’ve had to think through what it would mean for her in the day-to-day reality of living if she gave what she had to live on.

I believe one of the things Jesus is trying to underscore is that giving is as important to the person who gives, as it is to those who receive. And EVERYTHING we do for the Kingdom of God; we are to do intentionally and thoughtfully...not mechanically or haphazardly...

Everything is to be done out of love for God. Our living for God isn’t supposed to be driven by a constant, careful calculation of life so that we make sure we have everything we want.

But neither is living for God supposed to be driven by guilt, where we feel so badly about having anything at all that we can’t enjoy the good gifts God has given us.

None of that thinking is a part of the widow’s story. But what is part of this story is clear; when the love of God underlies and surrounds what we do, our priorities are re-shaped and decisions become a little clearer—not always easier, but at least a little clearer.

God continually gives us such an amazing, extravagant love that there should certainly be times in our lives when we are so overcome by that love, that we do something extravagant in return.

Something that will come from the heart of us, and just maybe, turn our lives upside-down forever. Something we do that is done out of the sheer joy of belonging to God: a celebration of life and love and hope.

Maybe something that throws us completely on the mercy of God, with absolute trust and the wonder of being called child of God.

When love of God is at the center of our lives, we don’t mind as much living out the commandment to love the neighbor too. Reaching out to tell people of God’s love in Jesus and helping them in very specific ways...

Becomes something we do out of love for God, not because those people we help love us back or even thank us. We do it all because God loves us—and in this world—helping people in need is one big way to love God back.

What sets the widow apart isn’t the size of her gift. Obviously, people of greater wealth gave far more. What sets the widow apart is the totality of her gift. She understood something the disciples hadn’t yet grasp...

Total commitment to God, and that the call of the Gospel is a call to absolute surrender.

What the widow did foreshadowed what was to follow, for it helps answer some of our questions about who Jesus is and what Jesus does. With utter simplicity and devotion to God...

Jesus will give everything He has to give. In one extravagant gesture of trust and love, Jesus will turn the world upside-down and set it right.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, what you did for us was to give everything, even your life. It is your gift to us that makes our own lives worth living. We have no way to repay you, no way to earn your love. Yet your love showers us with new life and overwhelms us with mercy. Help us to live more extravagantly for you, more freely and filled with joy, allowing your love to burst from us in acts of mercy that will change the world for somebody.

**Children / Young at Heart Story**

**Theme**

It isn't the size of the gift that matters.

**Object**

A small coin purse with $.57 in it.

**Scripture**

Mark 12:38-44

Each Sunday in our worship service we take an offering. Raise your hand if you think Jesus likes it when we put *a lot* of money in the offering plate.

(Pause, and then announce the number of votes.)

Raise both hands if you think Jesus likes it when you put *a little* bit of money in the offering plate. (Pause, and then announce the number of votes.)

The Bible says, one day Jesus went to the temple and sat down near the place where the offerings were given. He sat and watched the people as they came by and put in their offerings. Many rich people, dressed in fine robes, came by and put in a lot of money. Then a poor widow came by and put in just two small coins. Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, "This woman has given more than anyone. The others gave out of their wealth, but this woman gave all that she had."

You see, Jesus is more interested in what is in the heart of the giver than He is in the size of their gift.

I have a small coin purse. (Pour out the contents, have a child count it, and have the child tell how much there is.) That isn't very much money, is it? But it can remind us of a little girl named Hattie and how her gift of 57 cents helped to build a great church.

One Sunday morning, the pastor of a church went outside to find a group of children who were unable to get inside for Sunday school because the building was too crowded. One of those children was six-year-old Hattie. When the pastor saw Hattie, he picked her up and carried her into the Sunday school class where he found her a seat. He told Hattie he hoped that someday the church would be able to build a building large enough for all the children.

Two years later, Hattie died, and the pastor preached at her funeral service. After the service, Hattie's mother handed the pastor a small purse containing 57 cents. She said Hattie had been saving her pennies to help the church build a new Sunday school building. The pastor took the 57 cents back to his church and told the people about Hattie. The people were so inspired by Hattie's gift that they gave faithfully until they built a wonderful, new building — big enough for all the children who wanted to attend.

I’m sure Jesus would say that Hattie gave more than anyone to build this great church. Her heart was pure, and she gave all that she had.

**Let us pray,**

Dear Father, everything we have is a gift from You. Help us to remember to give back to You with a cheerful heart.  In Jesus' name, amen.

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