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Mark 12:38-44

*Generosity*

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Mark 12:38-44 New Revised Standard Version

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.”

Let me tell you a story. Now, this is probably more legend than actual historical fact. It is about a people known as the Gauls. In ancient times, the Gauls inhabited what is now France and Belgium. They spoke a Celtic language, and their religion was Druidic. By the time of the Christian era, the Roman Empire had conquered the Gauls, and they were theoretically under its control. Many of the Gauls, however, did not take well to being a conquered people, so various uprisings and battles continually broke out.

In the meantime, though, a number of Christian missionaries went into the territory to evangelize. Over time, many of the Gauls converted to Christianity and were baptized. But here is the legend: The story goes that before the Gauls would go under the water for their baptism, they would hold up one arm in order to keep it from getting wet. Therefore, when the next battle broke out, the Gaul could proclaim, “This arm is not baptized.” He would then grab his club, sword, or axe with that particular arm and ride off to destroy his enemy.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Do we do the same thing? Do we try to hide one part of our life from God? Is there a secret part of ourselves that we think God doesn’t know about? An addiction? Anger? Fear?

In our scripture we heard the story of the widow’s mite. It is a story that I had always thought was about generosity. I thought that Jesus was lifting up the widow and her gifts because Jesus wants us to be more like the widow. I had always thought that I should be like the widow and give everything that I have, which is impossible so I will give nothing. I remember when I served as a youth minister at a church in Plano and they were having a building campaign. Someone from the church shared about how we should all give and they shared that they were going to give $50,000 and I thought they don’t need my $200 dollars. We think our financial gifts aren’t big enough; they aren’t sacrificial enough so we won’t give anything at all. In our scripture Jesus calls out the temple scribes who he says devour the houses of widows. The widow puts in two small copper coins but we don’t know her motivation. Did she give of her own free will or was she paying the temple tax and the result of that tax was to leave her penniless? Is Jesus expressing his sadness at the way that the temple scribes are exploiting the widows and the poor? Why does the widow feel compelled to give away the little that she left? We don’t know.

In John Wesley’s sermon on the Use of Money he said that we are called to gain all we can, save all we can, and give away all we can.[[2]](#footnote-3) We don’t know what motivated the widow to give all that she had, but the implication is that she was left destitute. Jesus says she put in everything she had, all she had to live on.

A few weeks ago my husband went to Highland Park UMC because one of our good friend’s child was getting baptized. Over lunch I asked Lee how worship was and he said, “Good, the preacher talked about money.” “Ooo….,” I said, and Lee said, “No, it was good. He told us that they didn’t need our money.” “They did,” I said? We would not say that at Greenland Hills, we do need your money. Lee told me that the preacher at Highland Park UMC shared only 10% of the folks at Highland Park give to the church. Here at Greenland Hills we are doing better than 10%. At Greenland Hills 30% of our folks give to the ministries of this church. Which is good, but that means 70% of the folks who are a part of this family of faith give nothing to financially support the ministries of this church. And that makes me sad.

It makes me sad because giving to the church brings me so much joy. It makes me happy that our giving to the church is the biggest monthly expense in our budget. Giving is a blessing in my life because it has transformed my life from being all about me, to being more focused on others. In Acts 20:35 the Apostle Paul remembers the Lord Jesus’ words saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” But if it is more blessed to give then to receive, then why don’t more people give? Why aren’t more people generous? Is it because we are holding our arm out like the Gauls and we want to do whatever we want?

Everything that we earn is not ours. It is all God’s. We are the stewards of the money that we have and the resources that God has given us. But it is all God’s. How we use our money matters to God. Yes, our giving matters to this church but our giving also matters to us. The act of giving our money is as much a spiritual discipline as the act of bowing in prayer. But it is hard to put our arm and our wallet in those baptismal waters. The reformer Martin Luther said humans need to experience three conversions in order to fully live our faith: a conversion of our heart, a conversion of our mind, and a conversion of our purse.

When we give to the church we are invited to intentionally give up something that we value, our money, as one way of expressing our love for God and for what God is doing in this church and in this world.[[3]](#footnote-4) We at Greenland Hills are a generous church. This weekend at the Global Village market we are raising money for 30 non-profits around the world, last year we raised over $32,800. None of that money went to the church budget. None of it was used to pay for lights or air conditioning or Sunday School curriculum or staff salaries. It was all given away. We give and we give and we give as a church because we love. Loving and giving are forever linked together. If you love being in this place, if you love bringing your child to Sunday School or Youth Group or having them find love and welcome and learn about Jesus, then you give. If you love Jesus, if you love this church, then you give to the work of Jesus, you give to the work of God.

Every time you write a check, every time you give online, every time you put money in the offering plate, your gift matters.  Your generosity matters.  It matters because the key to a blessed life is a generous heart.  The key to joy, the key to peace, the key to hope, the key to goodness is a generous heart. May we listen to God’s call to be generous because it is more blessed to give than to receive. Amen.

1. Story told by Rev. Shannon Kershner, <http://fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/100415.html>. Source is Mark Allan Powell, Giving to God, pp.xi–xii [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-50-The-Use-of-Money [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. From Rev. Shannon Kershner’s sermon, http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/100415.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)