

November 14, 2021

Texts: Psalm 146; Mark 12: 38-44

Title: "The Widow's Gift"

I've heard lots of stories over the years from the famous investor and billionaire Warren Buffet who is currently one of the richest people on earth. Buffet caused a stir several years ago when he made the comment that his secretary pays a higher percentage of her salary in taxes than he pays. My guess is that this is because wages are taxed differently than are investments. Some were shocked by his example while others just shrugged their shoulders and said, "That's the way capitalism works."

Nonetheless, here's the likely truth about Mr. Buffett's secretary that he did not comment on: That is, **if his secretary is like most of the secretaries in this world, she probably gives more money to her church proportionally than her boss does.** Now I know that Mr. Buffet is a very generous man. He gives away a lot of money to a variety of good causes as many do. But the principle remains--on a percentage basis, those in the lower echelons of society tend to give more of their income to serve Christ than do those who employ them.

Jesus and his disciples were in the temple courts where he was teaching in an area near the treasury. The room was probably jammed with people who'd come to offer sacrifices during the feast of Passover.

From their vantage point, Jesus and his disciples could see what people were putting into these receptacles. There was a long line of wealthy people who were

making a show of their giving. They didn't have paper money in those day. They just had coins. Some of them dropped in a large amount of coins that rattled that made a lot of noise when they dropped them in. All the noise from their offerings no doubt got the attention of those around them. People notices them and they also noticed that they were wealthy. But Jesus' attention was drawn to a poor widow who came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

Jesus called his disciples over to him and said to them, "...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" (vs 43-44).

When it comes to giving, people are impressed by how much we give; God is impressed by how much we have left over. It's the fact this women's gift was a sacrifice that made it powerful. She didn't have anything left over. That's faith. She apparently didn't worry about tomorrow. She knew that God held the future and she trusted him to take care of her just as he was taking care of her today. She owned very little. She lived simply. Yet, her life was characterized by a genuine heart for God and grateful spirit that motivated her to give generously.

And you know, the devotion of this widow isn't an isolated example. Over the ages there have been many people with very limited means who give sacrificially to God and find the joy in doing that.

Dr. Scott Weimer, a pastor tells about a Kenyan woman who was a member of his church. Her name was Lydia. Lydia loved her church but she really missed certain aspects of her church back in Kenya; especially, she said, “I miss the offering. In Kenya,” she said, “we would dance down the aisles during the offering. We didn’t have much to give, but what we did have we gave with much joy. What a privilege to give back to God!” she said. Now I ask you, what’s going on in a person’s life that they feel so passionate about giving back to God? The widow in the temple isn’t an isolated example, believe me. **The secretary who gives far more to her church than her wealthier boss isn’t an isolated example either. In fact, it’s the rule, not the exception.**

Higher income or a better economy, as a rule, doesn’t generally help us become more generous. In fact, it often works the other way. Wealth can be a narcotic; the more you have, the more anxiety you feel that you don’t have enough or that you might lose it.

John Maxwell notes that people in the U.S. in recent years have averaged donations of about 2.5 percent of their incomes to charitable causes. That’s lower than it was during the Great Depression (2.9 percent). And 80 percent of Americans who earn at least \$1 million a year leave nothing to charity in their wills, according to John Maxwell.

My point this morning is that the way we regard our possessions is a basic

spiritual issue. That's what we call "stewardship." It's about how we use what God has given us, which is basically, everything. That's why Jesus talked about money a lot. It wasn't because he and his disciples were trying to raise big offerings. He had no need of it, but he saw the power for good of the spiritual discipline of giving. Really, it ranks right with the importance of prayer and love for our neighbor.

In the United Church of Christ, this is Stewardship Sunday. I know that many now say that it shouldn't be just one Sunday but an ongoing emphasis. But for this Sunday, it's a time for us to prayerfully consider along with our families and our God, what and how we will give to the ministry of this wonderful church in the coming year.

I encourage us all to consider the attitude and the power of the example of the widow with the two coins for the sake of the ministry that is being done and will be done here and for the sake of our own spiritual growth. And thank you for all you give and all you do! Amen.