

Mark 12:41-44

What is considered proper etiquette for tipping today...10%, 15%, 20%? I suppose it depends on how good or how poor the waitress or waiter was. Twenty-percent for prompt, courteous service; ten-percent or less for poor service. Did you ever give 100%? I hardly think so. The server only waits on our table. He or she does not go out into the kitchen and prepare the meal. They just bring the prepared food to us. A tip of 100% would hardly, therefore, be appropriate.

Yet, one woman did just that. She gave 100%. It amounted to one penny, but it was all that she had. It was 100% of her income. No one would have known except that Jesus pointed her out. Mixed in with all the wealthy givers, Jesus saw a poor widow put two small copper coins into the treasury box in the temple. His disciples paid no attention. All the other worshipers hardly gave her a glance. But Jesus spoke up: "This poor widow," He said, "Put in more than all the others."

Would you have noticed? I doubt if we would have. Pennies do not pay the bills. If all we had were poor widows putting pennies into our offering plates, we wouldn't have a church for very long. We notice, not the small amounts, but the large ones. Let's be honest...what that woman did was very noble, but her two coins would probably have been ignored when the temple officers counted the money later on--even Jesus knew that. She may have given all she had, but without all those wealthy families tipping their ten, fifteen, or twenty percent, the collection wouldn't even be worth counting.

So what is Jesus' point here? He surely does not expect us to be like that widow and give all that we have to the Lord? Was He criticizing those who gave a lot? But at least they gave, unlike the heathen who wouldn't give a thing to God. It's a nice story, but what do we really learn from it? Friends, it has much to teach us, and it teaches us in two ways--from the perspective of the Law, and from the perspective of the Gospel.

First the Law. This story clarifies for us that there is a difference between giving and tipping. The poor widow gave. All the wealthy who put in their gold coins worth thousands more than her penny were, in reality, only tipping. Someone who gives blood gives of them self. Parents, whose sons or daughters were killed in the line of duty as police officers or servicemen and women, know what it means to give. The poor widow in the temple gave. Why? Because it hurt. Giving, true giving, always hurts.

Like the widow from Zarephath, the temple widow did not know where her next meal would come from. She had no savings account, no stocks or bonds, no husband to provide for her. She had nothing except two copper coins, and she gave not one of them, but both of them to the Lord. That's not tipping; that's giving. But all the wealthy who filled the treasury with their gold coins were not really giving to the Lord. They were just giving Him a tip--something they wouldn't miss. It did not hurt for them to drop in their money. Their contributions were out of their abundance, says Jesus; the widow gave out of her poverty.

Are we here at Christ Lutheran Church givers or tippers? Which do we resemble more? It hurts to give. Tipping is pretty painless. When a church member gives, they notice that the money is gone. As the poor widow missed her penny, so today a true giver knows that the money they gave to the Lord is missing from their checkbook, and it hurts. A tipper, however, gives leftovers--money that wouldn't be missed very much.

But here is an amazing truth...givers do not complain, and yet tippers sometimes do. The poor widow said nothing when she gave her last two coins. No fanfare. No "Woe is me; that's all I had left!" She did not complain. She gave to the Lord and walked away. God loves a cheerful giver, and that's what givers are. They give because they want to. They give for the joy of giving. They give because they love the Lord. Tippers may give out of a sense of duty...because others are watching, because they're supposed to. And though it doesn't really hurt, they often complain that they have to give.

Givers do not care what others are giving. Their eyes are not fastened on their neighbor; they are fastened on the love of God for them in Christ. Life, for them, is not about money and what money can buy. It's about living in the fear and love of the Lord. Life is about Jesus. A church full of givers will have no money problems, except the problem of what to do with all the extra income. A church full of tippers will miss out on the joy of knowing what living freely in the Gospel is all about because they are always focused on money; they are at times critical of others; they are usually concerned more with how much is given than why it is given.

Givers are consistent with their giving. Tippers can often find reasons to give less...something the pastor said, something a member did. If they have a gripe, their giving goes down. If they're angry, they may give little to nothing. Givers do not rate the service of the "waiter" before giving since the meal is from God's kitchen. He prepared it. On the cross, the food of life was made ready for them. Through His Word and Sacraments the food is served to them. And it is the food they need--the meal of salvation. No matter how it is served--well, or poorly--givers are thankful for the food, and they give because they are thankful.

Now back to our question...Are you and I givers or tippers? Isn't it true that too often we are only tippers? And we tip the waiter at Applebee's more than we tip our loving God. We give him ten, fifteen, or twenty percent, but we give God only a fraction of that. We may resemble tippers much more than we resemble true givers...that's what this story teaches us from the perspective of the Law, but now listen to what this story teaches us from the perspective of the Gospel.

The poor widow in the temple is Christ. Jesus noticed this woman because she was doing the very thing He was about to do. Already a widow living in poverty, this woman made the final sacrifice--she gave the only thing of value she still had. She did not cling to it. She freely, cheerfully, without hesitation sacrificed all she had left. She gave her offering. Friends, that is what Jesus did for you. He came to our world leaving His glory on high. He lived here in poverty, and He did this for you. "He became poor," the Bible says, "that you might become rich." And then He made the final sacrifice. All He had left to give--His life's blood, His dying breath--He gave for you on the cross.

To the world it seems like nothing. The world ridicules the poor widow's penny. "What good is that!" it laughs. And the world scorns the death of the Son of God. It means nothing to them. How much better is all the wealth and gold that is dropped into their hands. But what good is the death of Jesus on a cross! Like the widow's mite, the offering of Christ, just like His Word and Sacraments, is seen by the world, to be of no value at all--worth but a penny.

But as Jesus took notice of what the widow gave, so God took notice of what His Son gave on the cross. And God, in response, declares you forgiven. Jesus' blood, worth but a penny in the eyes of the world, has purchased for you, my friend, forgiveness, life, and salvation--the gift of heaven--a place in eternity with all the blessed ones. Jesus did not hold back just as the widow did not. He did not give only partially. Like the widow, He gave for you all He had left to give.

And this was no tip. It hurt Him to give. The thorns, the nails, the splintery cross, the punishment of God--it pierced His very soul with agony to give His life for you. But He did not complain. He opened not His mouth. As the widow walked up to the offering box, gave, and then walked away, so Jesus was led up to Calvary and death carried Him away, and no complaint was on His lips.

Jesus was no tipper; he gave everything for you. He did not look to see what sort of man, woman, or child you would be; whether you would love Him truly; whether you would be a giver one day. He saw you only in love. He saw your grievous sins, your helplessness, your place in hell as punishment for your wrongs. And so He gave up His rightful place in heaven and took your place in eternal darkness that you might have a place with Him in glory. He gave up His spirit with His dying words, "It is finished!" so that your sins are washed away in baptism's flood; so that your helplessness is now replaced with courage, faith, and hope.

And friend, Jesus is a true giver because His giving is always consistent. He does not give you less forgiveness the more you sin. He does not stop giving you His promise of eternal life when you and I break our promises to Him. His giving remains the same. Right now as His gracious words come into your ears He is giving you the Holy Spirit and faith to believe this. At His Holy Meal He keeps giving you faith-strengthening food with His body and blood. Whether you give Him a lot--of your money and time, or whether you tip Him only a little, He gives you His word that He will never leave you nor forsake you. He remains your merciful Savior, and you are always His forgiven child.

This story does teach us much. It teaches us that more often than not we are not like that giving widow. But even more, it teaches us that the widow is like Christ, because He who gave Himself up on the cross for you, keeps giving you His eternal gifts today, and everyday through His words of life. Amen.