

Mark 12:41-44

We who gather here today are citizens of this great nation. We do not stop being citizens when we walk through the doors of this church. And thus, on this Veteran's Day, we are mindful and thankful for all who have served in the past, and we pray that God would bless and protect those who serve now in the Armed Forces of our nation. And because we are citizens, it may be difficult for us to lay aside the events of this past week--the election on Tuesday--and give our attention to more important matters. But this is what God calls us to do. If we are Democrats, to stop celebrating, and if we are Republicans and Conservatives, to stop licking our wounds, and for this hour turn our eyes away from the temporal house in which we live--our country--to the eternal treasure God has for us here and now.

Don't you think it was hard for the widow in our text to do this very thing? To focus not on her poverty, but on the richness of God's grace? To turn away from things temporal to things eternal? She was a worshiper of God in Spirit and in Truth, for she was not in church thinking about her roast in the oven...there was none. She was not planning her week in her mind as she was worshiping...there was nothing to plan except to lay down and die. She put her last two mites in the offering box and went her way rejoicing because she had a God who loved her whether she lived or died.

We encounter this woman just once--here at the temple. We know very little about her past, only that at some time in her past her husband died. We know nothing about her future. We meet her only in the present, and this only because Jesus points her out. He was watching the people put their offerings into the box. But none of them raised His eyebrows. Even when large contributions were given, He said nothing. But seeing this poor widow put in all she had, He called His disciples over to point her out to them, and to us.

What God looks at is the direct opposite of what we look at. No one paid the widow any attention. But those who gave large offerings would have been noticed by all. Jesus paid little attention to the large givers, but the widow with her two mites drew His undivided attention. The people then, and we today, look at how much is given to the Lord. But the Lord looks not at how much is given, but at how much is left over after the offering is given. It did not hurt in the least for the very wealthy to put in large contributions. Their offerings barely made a dent in their checking account balances. But when this widow gave her two mites, it was a tremendous sacrifice, for there was nothing that was left over.

Now here's a question we need to consider. Why did Jesus draw the attention of His disciples to this widow? And why is this story in the Bible? Why does Jesus draw our attention today to this poor widow? Is it to make us feel guilty? Are we to check our own hearts and ask ourselves, "Am I more like the big givers, not in how much I give, but in what is left over after I give? Is there no pain, no sacrifice involved when I give? Or, like the widow, does it hurt when I give to the Lord?" The widow did not draw attention to herself when giving her offering. But the large givers were noticed by all. What about us? Do we give in order to be noticed? Or do we give simply because we want to give to the Lord?

Jesus did not condemn the people in the temple who gave large offerings. He was not impressed with them, but He did not condemn them. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that God loves big givers. But He does love a cheerful giver. If those people who came to the temple gave from a cheerful heart when they gave their large contributions, then their offerings were accepted by God. And with us as

well. God accepts your offerings--the money you give, the time you give--whether you give a little or a lot, when your offerings are given from a cheerful heart.

No, Jesus did not draw His disciples attention to this poor widow, nor does He draw ours, in order to create a sense of guilt. God wants no one to give because they are shamed into it. He wants no one to give more because they feel guilty about what is left over after they give. Jesus draws our attention to the widow for this reason--because the manner in which she gave is precisely the manner in which God gives. Jesus noticed this widow because her giving heart was a wonderful reflection of the heart of God.

This woman gave from a cheerful heart. So does God. Everything you have that is a blessing in your life, you have received from God. And He gives you all that you have simply for the joy of giving. This applies to your temporal gifts which are only for this life, and to your eternal treasures in Christ. It says of Jesus that, "*For the joy that was set before Him, (He) endured the cross.*" Sometimes mothers tell their child, "You'd better appreciate the fact that I endured painful, hard labor bringing you into this world." Maybe it's said in a half-kidding way; maybe not. But Jesus endured the most painful labor of all on the cross, and He never once had anything but pure joy in His heart as He suffered for you. God gives always from a cheerful heart.

This poor widow gave her offering and she held nothing back. She gave all that she had. This is how God gives to you. His love for you moved Him to give up His only Son. He gave all He had. Jesus went to the cross and He suffered for every sin of yours and mine. He endured fully the torments of hell. He was forsaken completely by His Father in heaven for your sake. He held nothing back. He gave Himself fully for you. And today He gives you fully what He won on the cross for you. He speaks through His called servant, "I forgive you all your sins." We take for ourselves all week long. We're selfish and self-focused. Jesus does not give in this way. He died for all of you. He forgives all your sins. His love and mercy embraces each one of you. He is not stingy with His grace. Even if we are poor givers, even if we are less than cheerful givers, Jesus gives to you now--to all of you--His full and free forgiveness. And with this forgiveness He assures you of a place with Him in heaven. God gives always without holding anything back.

I am confident that we will meet this poor widow in heaven. Only she won't be poor anymore. With all the saints, she enjoys the treasures of heaven for all eternity. She gave all she had here on earth out of love for her Lord. We have, in this sense, many poor widows here in this congregation--men, women, even children who give your offerings to the Lord...not because you have to, but because you want to, because you love Him, because you know and believe that He gives all things to you freely in Christ Jesus. Amen.