

**Series Title: “Glad and Generous Hearts”**

**8 November 2015: 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

FUMC—Arlington, TX 76011

“A Mentor for Good Giving”—Preaching Text: Mark 12:38-44

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“He who gives what he would as readily throw away, gives without generosity;  
for the essence of generosity is in self-sacrifice”

— (Henry Taylor).

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Hear the Gospel reading for the day:

38 And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places 39 and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, 40 who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

41 And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. 43 And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44 For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living” (Mark 12:38-44).

One of the things Jesus offers his disciples in this text is a warning against wrong faith expressions. Jesus denounces the scribes and cautions against three things:

- a desire for status rather than service;
- a desire for esteem instead of seeking the good of others;
- and third of all, using one’s position for advancement and self-gain.

Faith means to relate rightly to God and to neighbor—as Jesus praised the scribe for noting in last week’s lesson. Authentic reverence for God liberates our hearts to give generously to both God and neighbor.

Jesus taught the 12 a vivid lesson in giving with love. Love does not keep score; love spends plentifully! Jesus drove this point home to his disciples while observing people offering their temple gifts. Jesus praised a poor widow who gave the smallest of coins by contrast to the affluent who gave greater sums. How can someone in poverty give more than someone who has

ample means? Jesus' answer is simple: real giving comes from the heart. A grudging gift or given for display loses its value. Yet a gift given out of generous and sacrificial love is invaluable. The size does not matter.

The poor widow could have kept one of her two coins, but instead she recklessly gave away all she had! Jesus praised someone who gave barely a penny—how insignificant a sum—because it was everything she had, her whole living. What we have to offer may look very small and unworthy, but no matter how insignificant it may seem to us, God can use it far beyond our reckoning. Do you know the joy and freedom of giving substantially to God and to neighbor with gratitude and love?

We might say that this poor widow was something of a mentor for good giving, especially as Jesus remind his disciples and us that “. . . she out of her poverty has put in everything she had . . .” (Mark 12:44).

Of course there are skeptics. “You have come a long way baby,” the old commercial suggests to a new female generation for whom a particular cigarette company hopes to lure to become new smokers. This signals but one of thousands of changes in the status and role of women from early days. Women not only vote today, but hold significant political offices. Women have flooded the workplace and are leaders in many Christian communities. They are doctors and lawyers and judges and such. Women's economy has introduced a seismic shift from the day when Jesus told this parable, “the Widow's Mite.”

In any bookstore we find a wealth of publications that remind us that women in general, and widows in particular, control a vast amount of wealth in the United States. Regularly the wealth comes from inheritance at the time of a spouse's death. Yet many hard-working women accumulate riches by also being shrewd investors. Thus, in some ways the social circumstance upon which Jesus establishes his parable is no longer in force. Yet, even today, women and children bear most of the brunt of poverty—a fact that should never escape people with a

conscience.

Nonetheless the “Widow’s Mite” is a dearly beloved story. As originally told by Jesus, the parable’s intent addresses the stewardship law that all persons have some gift to give—no matter how large or how small. Thus, the parable is more about the willingness to give, rather than the parable is about the ability to give.

Recently I read in some magazine a story about generosity with one’s time: Today, at the local convenience store where I work an elderly man with a guide dog came in, went to the aisle with the greetings cards, picked up a card, held it up extremely close to his face, and struggled to read it. Just as I was about to walk over to help him, a big truck driver asked him if he needed assistance reading, and then proceeded to read him almost every single greeting card out loud until the elderly man smiled and said, “That’s perfect! My wife will love that one!”

Fred B. Craddock once wrote:  
The issues of wealth and poverty are complex . . . . Anxiety about money is a disease among both those who have it and those who do not . . . . Generous sharing of one’s goods can free one from the danger to the soul which lies coiled in the possession of things . . . . The disciples are to handle material things so as to secure heaven and the future. How one handles property has eternal consequences . . . . The life of the disciple is one of faithful attention to the frequent and familiar tasks of each day, however small or insignificant they may seem. The one faithful in today’s nickels and dimes is the one to be trusted with the big account [Luke: Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009) 189-191. cf. Luke 16:1-13].

Later, Craddock addressed ministers and shared the practical implications of living for Christ:

“We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1000 bill and laying it on the table— ‘Here’s my life, Lord. I’m giving it all.’ But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid’s troubles instead of saying, ‘Get lost.’ Go to a committee meeting instead of doing what we want to do. Giving a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home instead of hanging out with our friends. Usually giving our life to Christ isn’t glorious. It’s done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it’s harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul” ([www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/faithfulness.htm](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/faithfulness.htm)).

We live in a world in which people are occasionally inclined to be generous with other people—often anonymously as The Star-Telegram often illustrates in the cheers/jeers section. But true Christian generosity is reflected over time in the nickels and dimes of life. It is giving that is consistent, regular, and predictable. For example, a 64-year-old United Kingdom individual has been donating a pint of blood every three months for 30 years. Over that time, he’s given about 120 pints, according to *The Nottingham Post*. He also donates his platelets regularly. Colin Harrison said he started to give blood because he had just gotten divorced and was feeling emotional. “It’s terrific and there’s nothing to it really, it’s very simple and easy to do and you make such a difference.” He added. “I just think everyone should do it.” Harrison can’t give any more blood now, though. The scar tissue on his arm has become so thick that needles can’t penetrate well.

Giving to the church in regular and steady increments can go a long way in helping us keep our wealth or possessions in proper perspective. Many in our world today gauge the success of life in the things we own. Yet another way to examine life is to measure it by what we have shared with others.

My friend, Don Shelby, a retired UM pastor writes: “The true reason for a Christian’s giving is gratitude to God. The greatest joy in Christian giving comes when we simply cannot do otherwise.” I find that to be personally and permanently true.