

Sermon Mark 12 3844 24th S af Pent S B

Sermon: 24th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Mark 12:38-44 (v.44b)

Theme: How much to give as our offering

Goal: Based on God's love, to acknowledge that 100% we have belongs

to God.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: What can you buy on 20 cents? (To show two coins). As I know, 10 cents is the smallest coin we have. This was the equivalent to the widow's offering: two small coins. And Jesus said that she “has put more into the treasury than all the others”. How can we understand this? Is this an excuse for us to give just a small offering? What can we learn from this story? What can we conclude for our lives and for our responsibility towards the church

I – The widow

Widows were among the poorest in Israel. There was neither Retirement Plan nor Pension Fund. The Old Testament reading for today – The Widow at Zarephath (1 King 17:7-16) illustrates it well. They usually depended on charity and their hope was the Lord, as the Psalm 146:9 says it so well: “The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow.” The first Christian church took special care of the widows, as we read in Acts 6 and several other passages. James 1:27 says: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

We don't know anything about the widow of our text but what here is written states: She was poor and that “she, out of her poverty,” gave “all she had to live on”. We don't know what happen to her after this. Maybe she could have bought a piece of bread with these two small coins... but now...she gave all she had to the Lord.

II – The offering: Her and ours

Her offering reminds us about the offerings of the poor in Macedonia, who were willing to help the poor in Jerusalem during Paul's ministry. Paul wrote this good example in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5: “And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.”

Here is the secret of giving: “To give ourselves first to the Lord.” This happened in our baptism, when our parents and godparents gave us to Jesus, and happens every day when we renew our baptismal vow by confessing our sins and by confessing our faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have to acknowledge that whatever we are and whatever we have belongs to the Lord and is a gift from His gracious hand. We are just temporary stewards of His blessings and we consecrate to Him everything we have.

This means that our life, our job, our family, our time, our skills, our bank account, our free time, our hobby belong to God and we live and do everything according to His will (or, we try to do...). The money we bring to the church is not the only offering we give to God. When we care of our family well, when we manage our business well, when we use our skills and time to help someone, - these are offerings to the Lord, these mean “to give ourselves first to the Lord”.

But there is a specific kind of offering that is more sensitive to some people: money. I was sharing some ideas with some of you, and he said me: *Pastor, be careful when you talk about money in the church. Some people don't like it.* I know this. But I cannot ignore what the Bible says, and it is my task as pastor to preach the Bible. Our text is very clear when it says that “Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and **He** watched the crowd putting their

money into the temple treasury.” *The treasury consisted of several trumpet-shaped receptacles for people’s offerings... the money was used for the temple, for the benefit of the priests, and for the poor* (SB 260).

You don't know how much my offering is, and I don't know how much your offering is. But Jesus knows. A Bible Commentary wrote: *Jesus is present where His Word is preached, the Sacraments administered, hymns sung, and prayers said. But He is also present where money is given for His Kingdom work. Such giving is a holy activity that Jesus willingly observes. In the Gospel He observed that many gave much, and yet the poor widow gave the most* (Series B 261).

St. Thomas doesn't have an offering system or a control over the offerings as some churches have. Offering is part of our worship and each of us is accountable to God. As we see in this story, Jesus looks how much I give and He knows how much I have, and if I can give more generously.

One of the children came to me some Sundays ago after the service, very happy, and said: *Pastor, I gave so much to the Sunday School today* (I cannot remember the amount...). This is a good sign, that she was saving at home her coins to bring them as an offering. And it was more than just two coins...

Paul gave a good instruction about offering to the Corinthians: (1 Cor 16:2) “On the first day of every week, each of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up... (2 Cor 8:12) For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have... (2 Cor 9:7-8) Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”

Paul gives also the motivation to the offerings (2 Cor 8:9): “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty

might become rich.” The sacrifice of Christ for us is the ground and motivation for our offerings. As Luther wrote in the Small Catechism, after explaining the 2nd Article of the Creed about the Redemption in Christ: *that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.* Our offerings are a service to Jesus and to our neighbor.

Conclusion: *Jesus is not dependent on our gifts. Yet He has arranged to carry out His church's work through people like us. That's why He is interested in how much we give and encourages us to give sacrificially and generously (SB 262).* The more the church has, the better she can develop her programs and mission.

The story of the Widow's Offering helps us to understand that God doesn't despise any offering, whether it is big or small, depending on how much I have. It helps us to understand that God knows our heart, as the widow relied 100% on God's provision for her livelihood. It helps us also to understand that finances in the church are not just a matter of administration, but a matter of Christian life and part of our worship. St. Thomas is doing well according to our budget and the reports of the treasurer. But we can always do better, as God has big plans for our congregation to grow and to share the Gospel and His love in Jesus with more and more people around us and around our families.

We are approaching Christmas, when we will remember again the big gift each of us received from heaven, when God gave His one and only Son to be our Savior. As Jesus gave Himself to us, let us daily consecrate ourselves to Him and to His service. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle

Cape Town, 11 November 2012