Rev. Dr. Jim Gill                                                                         November 11, 2020

                                                       “Sacrifice”
                                                 Mark 12:41-44

INTRODUCTION TO MARK 12:38-44

I once saw a cartoon that depicted a pig and a chicken crossing the road. In the window of the local diner there was a sign “Bacon and Eggs $3.00.” The pig says to the chicken, ‘For you, it’s a contribution.  For me it’s a sacrifice.”

On this day when we honor sacrifice we have another example to emulate.  It is not an example of a fierce warrior or gallant leader, but a widow who comes to give to God.  Hear  the word of God from the gospel of our Lord, Mark 12:38-44

**The Widow’s Offering**

**41**He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. **42**A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. **43**Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. **44**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.”

Let’s pray.  Thank you Lord, for this vivid example of dedication and sacrificial giving.  We are humbled by this story.  We are inspired by this story.  We are encouraged by this story.  As we meditate on its meaning to us this morning may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to You O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.  Amen.

\*\*\*

I once saw an ad that could have come from the Babylon Bee, but ironically it wasn’t. It was an ad for an actual item.

The ad said, "Now you too can own a Genuine Coin From The Time of Jesus: The Widow's Mite. It’s a minor miracle that this coin has survived and now people of faith can study, cherish, and protect it for future generations. It’s yet another miracle that they’re so affordable.  While our limited supplies last, you may order the 2,000 year old Widow’s Mite for only $49.95 plus shipping and handling. Remember this is the genuine coin mentioned in the Holy Bible and it makes a perfect gift for your child, grandchild, or favorite clergyman.”  (today of course we would add clergywomen?  )”

I have my own, but I didn’t pay $50 bucks for it. In fact I don’t remember where I got it . It may have been my mom’s after she was a widow.

The widow that Jesus called attention to surrendered all.  Jesus had been watching the religious folk in their giving practices. In their day they didn’t pass a plate during a worship service.  The way they gave their offerings was in an open courtyard.

 Some went to great pains to make sure everyone knew how much they were giving and when they gave it. Some even paid trumpeters to announce that they were about to give.  (They didn’t want to be seen as tooting their own horn  )

Picture Jesus sitting with the leaders of the temple observing the people as they come in and are watching their donations. The donations were dropped in a long horn shaped metal receptacle.  There was no such thing as paper money so it all makes a terrible noise as it rolled down this long horn shaped object and fell into the pool of coins--kind of like the noise that the coin changers at the Kroger makes when someone bring in a pickle jar full of coins to the coin bank.

When the horns had all finished and the great amounts have been given along comes this poor widow.  All she has are two small coins.  The name of the coins she gave was called a “mite.”  M I T E.

A mite was worth about half a penny…She dropped them in and they barely make a noise. “tink tink.” (drop 2 pennies in a glass vase).  But there was more to the widow’s mite MITE than the monetary value of her offering—her gift demonstrated this widow’s MIGHT.

This widow is a great example of sacrifice.  In terms of the actual amount that she gave it was a mere pittance--less than one penny in today’s money. But her generosity was evident in the fact that it represented all that she had.  She surrendered all.

Why do WE give?  What is OUR motivation?  What do we hope to achieve by our giving?  Jesus said that the religious pious types gave to receive recognition. Of them Jesus said, “They received their reward.”

We just had an election.  For reference I’d like to share about another election.  In 1984, (an Orwellian year) the press disclosed the generosity of all the candidates in a presidential campaign. Gary Hart gave a total of $140 to all charitable causes.  Jesse Jackson, an advocate for the poor, gave a total of $500 to charity, even though his taxable income was well over $100,000. Ronald Reagan, who advocated that private citizens should pick up the slack of slashed welfare programs, gave only $2000 to all charitable causes, this on an income of several hundred thousand dollars. The highest giver was Walter Mondale, who gave around $13,500 to benevolences, out of an income of $500,000.

Some people were outraged that misers were running for public office. Perhaps they shouldn't have been surprised. These giving patterns are typical for many. Many calculate what it takes to live each week and then donate a little piece of what's left.  They give a portion of what we think we can afford. Then they want the IRS to take note of every cent.

But this widow sees her contribution differently. She gives her money, but not in order to receive some service in return. Her contribution has nothing to do with getting a tax break. She does not calculate the monthly budget and then decide what she can afford to give out of what's left. Rather she gives it all, and then she has to figure out how she is going to live.1

I read about a large church that hired a church fund-raiser to direct its ambitious financial campaign. The fund-raiser proposed his strategy at the first planning session. He wanted the members to visit every home.  He was met with immediate resistance. One cynic at the stewardship meeting cited that this church had a high percentage of retired people on fixed incomes. They could not be expected to pledge, the cynic argued.

The fund-raiser asked for permission to see in confidence the list of major givers. At the next meeting he told the stewardship work area that he had completed an analysis of the church’s giving patterns. “Please note that the majority of your top 50 contributors are ‘widows on fixed incomes.’ Please note that, according to my calculations, those ‘widows on fixed incomes’ pay about 60 percent of this congregation’s annual budget. I’d say if you want to improve the giving in this congregation, you need to talk to those women first, find out why they give, and then try to infect the rest of the congregation with the faith of these ‘widows on fixed incomes.’”2  Those widows, like the widow in our gospel lesson knew the meaning of sacrifice.

Someone this week sent me a meme that asked the question, “If money is the root of all evil, why do they ask us to give it in church?”   I responded, “I Timothy 6:10 says, “The Love of money is the root of all evil.”  The church asks you to give so you won’t love money so much and by parting with some of it you have a reduced potential of being evil.

Giving money is an outgrowth of giving of ourselves.  As we surrender ourselves to God and to loving our neighbor then we will want to give not only financial resources, but also we will want to give of our time in service to the church and the world.

Have you ever noticed how your time follows your interests? You get interested in something and you invest your time in it.  I have a friend who is an Air Hockey National Champion.  Air Hockey is that table game where two people try to knock a puck in the other’s goal using a round paddle.  He loves Air Hockey and dedicates hours to playing.

The same is true with our money.  Jesus worded it this way: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”. If we give of ourselves, our money will follow.  Show me your Discover bill and I’ll discover what is important to you. Show me how much you give to the Kingdom of God and then compare that with how much you spend on your personal hobbies and I’ll know what most important in your life.

Yet, God wants much more than our money. What God wants is our hearts and minds and hands and feet. Once we have surrendered these, other matters will fall into place. Let me ask you this, “If God gave you ten times what you give to God could you live on it?”

I loved the way one elder in a church I used to serve said it, He said, “I know God wants me to give, not because he needs the money but because of what it does for me.  Just like a parent that wants his children to make the right decision for the right reasons, God wants me to be in a right relationship with him through me cheerfully giving my tithe.“

God has entrusted us with great resources and we are to be stewards of God’s gifts. We are to be “executors” of God’s will … if you will. … (if you WILL).  God has given us so much and our responsibility is to make good use of what God has given us and to give back a portion of it to God’s work and God’s kingdom.

The apostle Peter said it well when he wrote in his closing words of this first letter.  He wrote, “God's gifts of grace come in many forms. Each of you has received a gift in order to serve others. You should use it faithfully.” I Peter 4:10

When I was serving in Baytown I attended the Baytown Rotary’s special luncheon honoring our veterans.  In addition to asking all veterans present to stand and be recognized they has a veteran from World War II who is 92 years old to speak. They had a veteran of the Viet Nam conflict.  They had a veteran of the Desert Storm, Desert Shield, and Operation Iraqi Freedom.  Each of them spoke of the sacrifices they made to serve.  The World War II veteran was one who stormed the beaches of Normandy on D Day.  He spoke about those who didn’t live to tell their story—who made the Ultimate Sacrifice.

We honor their memory this day.  We honor the memory of all veterans who served and have since gone to their heavenly reward.  We do this in the name of God who loved the world so much that he sent his only begotten son to pay THE Ultimate Sacrifice for the sins of the world.   We do that dedicated to the spirit of service called for by the apostle Paul who in his letter to the Romans wrote, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,[[a](http://link.icnsend.com/c/443/531f362570d5390d1a04052a2f288113d9ef2fe8c809bf0dfdcb76599665fac0)] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual[[b](http://link.icnsend.com/c/443/531f362570d5390d1a04052a2f288113d9ef2fe8c809bf0db5fe3387cf664478)] worship.” (NRSV)

It’s all about our relationships.  It was a relationship with a loving God that moved the widow to put in her last two mites. It is the relationship with your country that moved veterans to serve in our countries’ Armed Services.  It is the relationship with the loving God that has drawn you to God and will give you the motivation and will provide the motivation to give.

How many of you have ever bought a cell phone?   It may look great, brand new, shiny, sleek design, and have all the bells and whistles.  But after purchasing it still won’t work until it’s activated. .

May God give us the motivation to give and the activation to follow through to give back a portion of what we have been given.   If we do that…when we do that we will accomplish far more than paying $49.95 for a replica of the widow’s MITE.  The Lord will be pleased that we have tapped into and been strengthened by the widow’s MIGHT to be able to not only make a sacrifice but continue … until we die ..  to be a living …  sacrifice.

Let’s pray. Dear Lord, Everything we have comes from you.  Every breath we take is a gift.  Every step we take is a gift.  What a honor it is to know you are counting on us.  We have received freely from you and so we will give freely.

We pray for those who were elected to office. We pray for those who were not elected.  We pray for those who voted.  We pray for those who did not vote. We pray that the divide that threatens to grow wider will reverse course and bring us closer to one another.  We especially pray that what we have in common as brothers and sisters in Christ will move us to sacrifice so that others  who have less may have more, so that a new Armistice will take place to cause us to lay down our keyboards and our weapons and our burdens down by the riverside and study war no more.

Dear Lord, Today we honor our veterans, worthy men and women who gave their best when they were called upon to serve.  We pray that you will bless them, Lord, for their unselfish service in the continual struggle to preserve our freedoms, our safety, and our country’s heritage, for all of us.

Bless them abundantly for the hardships they faced, for the sacrifices they made
for their many different contributions to America’s victories over tyranny and oppression.
We respect them, we thank them, we honor them, we are proud of them, and we pray that you will watch over these special people and bless them with peace and happiness. We long for the day when all wars shall cease and the reign of peace will settle over our lands. These things we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

1. William G. Carter, No Box Seats in the Kingdom, CSS Publishing

2. Brett Blair, [www.eSermons.com](http://link.icnsend.com/c/443/531f362570d5390d1a04052a2f288113d9ef2fe8c809bf0d92df929b0e707446). Thanks to Lauren J. McFeater