

“Sacrifice and Trust”

Mark 12:41-44

10.24.21

Introduction

One day, Jesus and his disciples were in the Temple precincts, and they were “people watching.” Jesus saw a widow placing two copper coins in the Temple treasury. Our English translation says that this offering was worth about a “penny,” which gets us in the ballpark because it allows us to know that the widow’s gift was relatively small. However, the translators have to take a big idea and fit it into a small space.

The two copper coins were “leptas,” and leptas were the smallest denomination of currency in circulation at the time. Two leptas were one sixty-fourth the value of a denarius, and a denarius was one day’s wage of a day laborer. A denarius might translate to what a person would make at the end of an eight-hour shift making minimum wage.

Math is not my strong suit, but according to my calculations, the widow’s gift would have been equivalent to about \$1.25 at the end of the day. After a five-day work week, her gift would amount to \$6.25. At the end of the year, the widow’s gift would be \$325.

The reason Jesus selects the woman as the object of his lesson is because widows were generally destitute. In the ancient world, there was no spousal benefit, social security, penchant program, life insurance, and women were not allowed to work outside of the home. All widows were among the most vulnerable members of society, and especially those who had no living heir to support them financially.

Jesus also selects this particular woman to contrast her with the others putting money in the Temple treasury. According to Jesus, although the many rich people were putting in large gifts, they were putting in a smaller percentage. The widow was giving all that she had. In fact, the original language translates literally that she was, “putting in the whole of her life.” The Greek word used in this passage is “bios,” which is where we get our English word “biology.” She was putting in all of herself—her whole being.

Others were giving a larger amount, but they weren’t actually making a sacrifice. Although they were putting more money into the Temple treasury, they were also walking away with more money in their pocket than the widow.

This story is about sacrifice and trust. For Jesus, this woman is the example he wants his disciples to follow. The widow’s gift reflects the kind of giving that represents kingdom living. The widow’s example is what it looks like to authentically worship God through giving our gifts. She gives sacrificially and she trusts God to take care of her material needs.

What does it really look like for us to sacrifice? What does it really look like to trust God to take care of all of our needs? Inevitably, this will look differently for each of us.

Sacrifice and Trust

We might think of sacrifice as considering how we could otherwise use what we already give. Although that is certainly a part of the equation, sacrifice also includes asking what we might give up so that we can give more.

To be clear, conversations about sacrifice do not only pertain to our financial resources. Sacrifice also includes our time and our talents—sacrifice includes giving all that we are.

In the last year or so I was in a group conversation where someone said, “Financially giving is not a sacrifice for me. I’m in a position that I can give sacrificially. Instead, sacrifice for me includes my time.” This person went on to talk about how busy they are with work and family and that when they give their time to kingdom work is when they are truly making a sacrifice.

As a pastor, sometimes I struggle trying to figure out where my vocation ends and my personal service as a disciple begins. Maybe it doesn’t and perhaps I’ve created a false dichotomy. However, one tiny sacrifice of my time that I’ve made is joining the lawn care team here at St Andrew.

To be clear, this is not a major obligation on my part. I think I helped cut grass twice over the summer and both times took me less than an hour, but I believe that I need to lead by example and that we all need to sacrifice our time, talents, financial resources and have a healthy church. It would be a different story if I was out cutting the lawn every week, but others have also sacrificed their time to the upkeep of our property.

So, as you begin to look at your financial resources, your time, gifts, and talents, what will it look like for you to make sacrifices? Another dimension of the widow’s gift that is so closely connected to sacrifice is “trust.” By giving all that she had, the woman was completely trusting God to take care of her. Are we truly trusting God to take care of us if we are willing to live sacrificially?

Application

As we shared recently with the church, St Andrew is facing some financial challenges. We are entering a discernment process to consider, “What is God calling us to do? What is it going to look like for us to move forward and have sustainable ministries for future generations?”

As I’ve talked with several other pastors, the story is almost the same across the board. In 2020, many churches had a remarkable year financially. At St Andrew we were

actually able to pay more in our apportionments in 2020 than we were able the previous year. However, 2021 has been a difficult year financially for most churches.

As we look at what God is calling us to do, we might look at numbers and figures and hear the deficit and feel like our challenges are insurmountable. We might say, “I can’t make up the difference on my own.” And because of everything just stated, we might choose to not do anything. But it’s important to remember that in today’s scripture lesson, the person who is lifted up as the example to follow is not one who puts in large sums of money—it is the widow who puts in the lowest denomination of currency.

Once again, math is not my strength, but I did a few calculations and I figured out that if all of our giving units were collectively willing and able to increase our gifts by a widow’s mite in 2022, it would increase our ability to do ministry by about \$26,000. For some of us, giving a widow’s mite could be beginning a pattern of giving for the very first time. For others, it might be increasing our gift just a little more each month. Yet, some of us might also find ourselves in positions where giving a widow’s mite is no longer sacrificial. Ultimately it is a matter between each of us and God.

There probably aren’t too many of us who can singlehandedly close the gap, but that’s now not what the story is about. The story invites each of us to look deep within, consider the sacrifices we are willing to make, and collectively work together to exemplify kingdom living.

Reference Tools

Black, C. Clifton. *Mark*. 2011. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Hooker, Morna. *The Gospel According to Mark*. 1991. London: Hendrickson Publishers.

Keener, Craig. *IVP Background Commentary: New Testament*. 1993. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Nickle, Keith F. *Preaching the Gospel of Luke*. 2000. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.

Witherington, Ben. *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. 2001. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What is something you can't do that most people can? (e.g., blow a bubble with bubble gum, snap fingers, whistle).
2. As you reflect on this week's message, what one thought stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?
3. When you think of someone who has modeled sacrifice and trust in your life, who comes to mind? Why?
4. Have you considered ways you can sacrifice your time, talents, and gifts for the sake of the kingdom?
5. How have you witnessed God's grace recently?
6. How can we pray for you?