

This Is Not About Money **The ultimate Sacrifice**

Texts: Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

Hebrews 9:24-28 (Series B, 25th after Pentecost) Ps. 127

Gospel of Mark 12:38-44

O Lord, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the meditations of our hearts. Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen. Amen.

Today's gospel passage from Mark seems to have a lot to do with money. Given that the widow puts in money, Jesus is sitting watching people put their offerings into the money box, and then Jesus talks about money, this is obvious. There are some good messages about money here. It is good to give. Jesus doesn't condemn the rich who give lots.

And his comments and approval are given toward the poor widow who gave what she had. Giving money is good. And if we take what Jesus says about the widow seriously, giving till it hurts is good -- in fact giving till its has gone way past hurting may even be better.

However, there's more to today's gospel than just money and giving. You see, I believe that for us to give something, and let's stick to money here for a moment, is not hard.

Any of us can throw a few coins into a Lutheran Worl Relief box, a loony or two towards the Veteran thin cup, or a few dollars on the offering plate as it goes around each week, and not suffer too badly for it.

Twenty-five cents here; a loony there. Ten or twenty dollars another place. In the bigger picture, it doesn't matter. It's not going to kill us. It may mean one less coffee at Tim Horton, or one less lunch at MacDonald's or, but not much more. We can each give.

In fact, I believe that we all love to give right! This we are good at it. If someone in the community came forward with a problem; financial or otherwise; we would respond. Chores would be done for them.

Donations of goods, clothes, food, shelter, would be found. We did this some twenty five years ago during the ice storm well, you may fill in the blank here... perhaps it was a neighbour who was widowed, - a family member who became unemployed. We are reasonably good givers in my opinion. In fact, most of us are very good givers. We know that God wants us to give and love and help where we can.

We know that Jesus calls us to look after our family, our church, and the people around us. We know that there are always people who are worse off than we are. We know all that, and that places us firmly into the story we read today from Mark's gospel.

If Jesus were sitting here watching as we put our envelopes or our cash onto the offering plates, he would see a lot of giving. And I don't believe that he would get up and storm out in a huff because we weren't givers.

However, the question must be asked, would we be *credited* in the same class as that widow? Would we be worthy of special notice? As an example of real sacrificial giving? I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be put in that class.

Even though I give a percentage of my income, when I ask myself the question, " Samuel do I give out of my surplus?" the answer is pretty well, "Yes." When I look at the "stuff" I own, and other stuff that I want, I have to say, "Yes, I do tend to give from my surplus."

Yet in today's gospel story, we are faced with this widow who gave everything she had. Widows were right down at the bottom of the social order in Jesus' time. They had no male to defend them, or work to support them. They were like *unclaimed* baggage at Dorval International Airport or Winsor train station.

People weren't sure how they fit in, or what to do with them, but they were sure that widows were not their responsibility to take care of. So, widows and poverty went pretty well hand in hand. To expect a widow to have money was totally unrealistic.

It is no surprise that this particular widow only gave two small copper coins. Yet, those two coins were significant to Jesus. Imagine if you will, that the next time this offering plate comes around, you would place on it, let's say \$500.

Or maybe you're feeling really good that Sunday, so you put \$1000 on instead. Where would the money come from? What would you do once the money was gone? How would you feed the family this week, pay rent or mortgage this month? Would you lose your house?

OK maybe this example is kind of pushing it a bit, but what I'm talking about here isn't just *generosity*. It isn't just *giving*, or *tithing*, or *donating*. It's not even about *money*. This sermon is not about money. If it is not about money then what is it about?

What I'm talking about here is **faith**. The **faith** to really risk - to really sacrifice – and give all, that one has to give to God. To really give all that one has for what is right and good and true in the trust that God somehow, someday, will use that sacrifice and honour it.

Honour it not for the sake of me or us- the giver, rather honour it for the sake of the work of God in this world. Honour it for the sake of the Kingdom. For the sake of others in need, for the sake of the peace that God promises to our world. Today, as I speak - I look out upon a number of you who were involved in Scout, and who believed in the principles outlined by Lord and Lady Baden Powell almost 100 years ago.

It is said in Goma - near the border of *Rwanda (during that terrible time of ethnic cleansing)* - Scouts who were working in Katale Refugee Camp. From the start of the dramatic events in Rwanda, the Scout Associations of Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania mobilized their forces to help the hundreds of thousands of refugees that fled the massacres. The first action undertaken by the Scouts in the camps was to carry out a census of displaced people.

This difficult task, was carried out with very few means and with no official recognition, enabled many families to find relatives, even though they were sometimes in camps more than one hundred kilometres apart. <3>

Hundreds of Scout volunteers collected and buried the bodies of the victims of starvation, exhaustion, and cholera. In twelve days, in terrible conditions, conditions that resemble the worst scenes from Hiroshima after the Atom Bomb was dropped, the Scouts collected and buried of 26,634 bodies.

This in addition to caring for orphaned children, distributing food to as many needy persons as they could, digging sanitation ditches and providing clean water to the thousands of people moving into refugee camps each day. How do we give in comparison to this? How much do we sacrifice for the work of bringing health and hope to our world?

We read in the New Testament this morning about the nameless widow, who put her two small coins in the temple treasury. She gave everything. As the Scouts working in the Congo and Rwanda gave everything, as the veterans of World War II and our nations current peace keepers gave and are giving everything, because it was the right thing to do, the loving thing to do.

Think of it for a minute: Did the widow in today's scripture reading knew for sure what the outcome of her giving would be for herself - she did not know if she would live or die because of it. Her two small copper coins were all that she had. As for the Scouts in Rwanda they gave all they had.

And all the soldiers, peace-keeping, and all those who served in overseas during the last war, to be beaten, attacked, shot at, and endure hardships beyond our wildest nightmares -- and all for the sake of others - all for the sake of freedom - all for the sake of their love for their fellow human beings.

What is our faith like? I would like to imagine we are the widow giving all we have even our whole living remembering God to the final hours of our lives. But are we like her? As people of faith - do we care so much for those around us that we actually give up our comfort?

The Gospel text focuses – the impoverished widow who gives her last two coins to the local treasury. The contrast is made between her giving her very last penny and those who give large sums out of their wealth with plenty to spare.

The wealthy, of course, ran no risk of hunger or homelessness as this piece implies about the unnamed widow. Whatever became of her – was she cared for by neighbors, did she truly lose everything in a last moment of supreme generosity? We don't know. But, perhaps trusting it would be for good, she gave all she had without being thanked.

This day, November 11, 2018, is the 100th Anniversary of the Armistice that formally ended WWI, the momentary peace in the world that has never lasted long because we deny God's lineage in ourselves and others.

Abundance of wealth and privilege is not an antidote to the poverty of self-importance. When we fail to embrace the fullness of the Gospel message in how we live our lives, we may discover too late that too much is not enough.

What is poison? Anything, beyond what we need is poison: It can be power, laziness, food, ego, ambition, vanity, fear, anger or whatever”

Remember the Scouts who, at the risk of their very lives, do a good work each day in places like Rwanda and recall that you have neighbours who need comfort and support, that they desperate needs to be fulfilled in our own backyard, needs which your real sacrifice of money and of time, and of love can go along way in meeting those needs.

Remember the widow who gave her last coins, and trusted God - and as did Jesus - when he gave his life for us on the cross. Jesus calls each and everyone of us this morning, to give freely as we have freely received from his abundance of grace and mercy. For we can never out give God, never, never in this life.

We love God, because God first loves us. In the serving of our sisters and brothers may we be living expressions of the Good News we offer to our world. May we be empowered through the Sacrament which we are about to receive and **'make us cheerful givers and channels of your Peace'** Amen.