

Introduction

Before I dive into this sermon, I want to share two things.

First, Cassie and I had a wonderful trip and we are very glad to be back. Visiting our families and celebrating weddings was very fun, but we missed you all, we missed our home, and we're happy to be back worshiping with you all. I am so thankful to our guest preachers - including our own Liz Archambault - and to all you supporting those folks as they visited and served our church.

Second, last night I got home from a lovely dinner with the folks from our church who traveled to Malawi, and I turned on the news to see another mass shooting. 5 dead and 21 injured in Texas.

I have a hard time when I see violence like this to just preach what I was going to preach. It seems trivial to face another shooting and then talk about the importance of giving money. I wish I knew the words to say to speak to the causes or the cures of our nation's unique relationship to gun violence. So what do we do with a text about a poor widow giving all that she has? I won't tell you that this text speaks directly to mass shootings, but I do think that the idea of giving what we have to others is about as far away from violence as we can get. The more we give of ourselves, the more we love others with our actions and gifts, I have to believe the less likely we are to promote and commit violence. The more we give of ourselves, the more we are like Jesus, who was radically anti-violence. So, learning from this poor widow about giving money might be more about just giving

money; this story promotes a spirit of self-giving and self-sacrifice. When we are self-giving and self-sacrificing, we will practice and promote peace.

So, let's talk about this story of the poor widow's gift.

The Widow's Gift

Let me read again the second half of the story:

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."

Jesus talked quite a bit about money in his ministry, and most of the time, it's hard for us to swallow. Sell all my possessions? Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's? Here's another one, though in this story Jesus doesn't directly tell us what to do, but rather gives a model for giving.

The model is a poor widow. In Jesus's day, widows were placed in a difficult place socially and financially. Unless they married again or had a son to depend on, they could not earn money or own property. Becoming a widow for most women was a sure

path to poverty. The portrayal of this woman tells us that she did not get married again and did not have sons to help her. Now, because widows were in this situation meant that they were not held in very high esteem. They were a demographic who were to be pitied or looked down upon. They did not make for good models of how to live, much less good models for how to give money. And here is Jesus. Touching lepers. Eating with tax collectors like Zacchaeus. Using a widow as a model for giving.

Jesus tells us that the wealthy give out of abundance. When I read this, I don't think Jesus is saying that what the wealthy givers are doing is wrong. What I do think Jesus is saying is that, contrary to worldly thought, the wealthy are giving less than this poor widow. It seems that in the Kingdom of God, in the eyes of God, it is not how much we give in dollars and cents, but how much we sacrifice. This widow's two copper coins are not going to help the Temple's capital campaign, but because the widow sacrificed what she had in worship of God, she gave more.

Jesus tells his disciples that she gave out of her poverty, "but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." All she had to live on. I think what Jesus is pointing at for us all to learn is that this widow lives and gives in a way that shows that her priority is God and not herself. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The wealthy in this story gave a lot of money, but their treasure was still kept to themselves. This widow's treasure went to God, and there her heart is, there her priorities lie, in God over herself.

I don't want you to give all that you have. I don't want to see your life savings show up in the offering plate. But what I do want us all to do is consider how much we give. How much we tithe to this church in which we worship; how much we give to organizations that we believe in; how much we give as gifts to loved ones. Do we give in a way that prioritizes God? Do we give in a way that pushes us to sacrifice?

I've shared this quote before, but I want to share it again, as I think it helps us conceptualize giving as the poor widow gave. It's a quote from C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*.

"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little."

The widow gave more than she could spare. Even though she gave less than a penny, Jesus holds her up to us as models of giving.

For Us as a Church

This story is pretty straightforward. Jesus uses the actions of a poor widow to demonstrate to his disciples and to us what giving should look like. We use this story as an easy demonstration to children about tithing.

But this story is also about the context. In this sermon series, we've been discussing classic children's stories and how we can see them in a new light. Many of us have heard this story of the poor widow's gift, but we neglect the context.

This is what we don't normally talk about - in all honesty, before reading commentaries, I had no idea about the context of this story. Our reading this morning was not *just* the story of the widow's gift, it also included Jesus's quick lesson that directly preceded this widow story. Listen to it again.

³⁸ As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

It is not a coincidence that directly before the story of a widow giving to the temple, we hear about the temple workers, the scribes, quote "devouring widows' houses." In Scripture, space is limited and so words are very specifically chosen and the order of stories is often more significant than we know.

This story taken in its entirety provides us all with two challenges. There's an individual challenge and a corporate challenge. First, the challenge that Jesus gives us is to give. To give our of poverty, to give everything we have, all we have to live on. To

prioritize God in our giving and to give in a way that requires some sacrifice. That's the individual challenge - for each of us to reconsider how much we give.

The second challenge is corporate and it is this: as a church, we need to manage faithfully the money that individuals give us. We must not "devour widows' houses." This challenge is for all of us. It is for me as the pastor. It is for every Elder, every Deacon, every committee chair and committee member, for all members of our church. How do we use the money that we all give? Are the leaders of this church good stewards with the money that all of us here have given? We need to be good stewards of others' good stewardship.

I'm going to leave this challenge open-ended. As we go through the next few months, through stewardship month and creating budgets for our committees and churches, I want this challenge to be present in our minds. How are we using our collective money?

Conclusion

The story of the poor widow's gift teaches us to give sacrificially and to use the money given to us responsibly. It is for us as individuals and for us as a family. As individuals and as a church, do we give sacrificially? As individuals and as a church, do we use the money God has given us wisely? We are all, individually and corporately, responsible. How we use our money is one way to demonstrate to the world the sacrificial nature of Christ's love.