

Sermon for November 11, 2018
“Two Cents About Stewardship”

Mark 12:41-44

One day Jesus was in the Temple and warned his disciples about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Some people were giving gifts to God in the Temple and Jesus saw the opportunity for an object lesson. He sat down opposite the treasury and wealthy people came by and put large sums of money in the treasury. Bags of gold and silver. Then a poor widow came and put in two small pennies. When the total was added up at the end of the day her two cents would not add up to much. The scribes who did the counting would notice the bags of gold and silver, but would overlook her 2 cents.

Jesus, on the other hand, noticed the woman's offering. "Look," he said, "that woman has given more than anyone else." The disciples started counting on their fingers to figure out this new math Jesus was using. Even Matthew, with his accounting skills, could not make that ledger balance out. Jesus explained, "The others gave out of their abundance what they had left over, but this woman out of her poverty gave all she had."

What must that poor woman have been thinking? How would she live? How would she pay her bills or buy her food? Because of her action she would probably starve. Did she think that God would maybe pay her back with showers of blessings?

No, I think she realized that her only hope was in the Lord. She had nothing, except two pennies - and faith. She woke up that morning and took account of her resources. She realized that those 2 copper coins would not even feed her for the day, then she would starve. The two pennies couldn't support her, but her faith told her that God could. She wasn't trying to buy a favor from God. She was simply placing her whole trust in the only one who could sustain her.

There is a tragic irony in this story. Did you miss it? The real tragedy is not the poor widow who gave away her last two pennies. Ironically the real tragedy is the rich people. They placed bags full of spare change in the offering plate thinking they are doing good. They think they have something when really they have nothing.

The widow is the one who is truly blessed. Because of her poverty she realized that she had nothing. And because she realizes that she had nothing she casts all her hopes and her very life in God's hands, even to the point of offering her last two pennies. When the cold winter comes or the days of hunger, her hope is in the Lord. After all the Lord is the only one who can ever really meet our needs.

The rich people, on the other hand, have placed their hopes and their lives on their wealth. They thought that their money could protect them. But what is money? It is a material thing and material things rust and pass away; they are stolen and degrade in value. When marauding armies come, will their money save them? When thieves steal all they have, will their money protect them? When powers beyond human control prevail, will common currency rescue them? When God demands a reckoning for their life, could money redeem them? No, earthly treasures pass away, but spiritual wealth, like the faith and hope of the widow, those things are eternal!

In the church when we talk about money we often use the word “stewardship.” “Stewardship” basically means taking care of something for someone else. Imagine that you had a friend that had a nice house and they were going out of town for a while so they asked you to house sit for them. You would be a steward of that house. You would get to live in the house. You could have friends over and entertain them. You would sleep in the beds and sit in the chairs. You would

make yourself at home. You would also make sure it stayed clean, in good repair, and ready for your friend to come back home.

Now imagine that your friend called you up one day and said, “A friend of mine is coming into town for a while. Would you get a bedroom ready for them and make sure there are meals prepared for them?” Of course you would say “Yes!” A good steward would do no less. You would realize that the house does not belong to you. You have the privilege, the gift, of living in it, but it ultimately belongs to your friend.

That is stewardship. Everything we have is a gift from God. The Bible in Genesis describes God forming the first human from the dust of the earth and breathing life into it. God has made each of us and given us life. Every breath we take is a gift from God. Everything we have is a gift from God.

Let me give you an example. We are stewards of the church. By “church” I don’t mean the building, I mean the people. We at Aldersgate have this wonderful facility to meet in, a beautiful sanctuary and gym and fellowship hall and classrooms. Some churches don’t have a building at all. They meet in houses or in auditoriums or even under trees. Our Methodist ancestors met under brush arbors.

The church, whether you mean the people or the place where the people meet, is a gift from God. We refer to this as God’s house. The Bible speaks of the church as the house in which we are pillars(Gal. 2:9), or in another place that we are living stones built into the temple of God(1 Peter 2:5), or gems built in to the walls of the city of God.(Rev. 21) Previous generations have built up this community and its traditions, so that it can be here for us to live in. Likewise, previous generation have built and taken care of these facilities for us to use in mission and worship. We may live here as a church, but this place, both the community and the architecture, is God’s.

What if God called us up and said, “I have some friends who need what you take for granted. They need some love and support and guidance. Prepare a meal for them and a place for them to rest. Then go and give them my invitation to come and be renewed.” As good stewards we would need to make sure that God’s house, people and building, is ready to receive guests. And we would need to go into the community and invite them to come to be fed and to rest and to be renewed!

You see “stewardship” in not just about money. At the same time, part of it is about money. It takes money to run a church. We need funds to have the programs and ministries and facilities to welcome people into God’s house. Also we need the courage and dedication to go out and invite God’s friends, even those who don’t yet know they are friends of God, to come.

Often we talk about giving to the church we talk about tithing or giving a 10th of our income. Some people are not accustomed to that and some are not financially able. But thinking of the percentage of our income that we give is a good spiritual exercise. We can move step by step towards 10% as a goal. I encourage you this week to think about how much of your income you give, and I challenge you to give a little more so that we can be good stewards of God’s house. If you can only give a little, then give it in faith. Your small gift may really be more than anyone else’s, just like the widows’ gift.

Like the widow we need to realize that we are ultimately in God’s hands and all we have is God’s anyway. All the possessions we have, all the skills and talents, every second and year, even the breath in our bodies, is a gift from God. Let’s be good stewards and give thanks for all God has graciously allowed us to use. Let’s dedicate our entire lives to serving God. Join me as we include our income in that stewardship.