

## **Gospel: Mark 12:38-44**

*After engaging in a series of public arguments with religious leaders in the temple, Jesus contrasts the proud and oppressive ways of those leaders with the sacrificial humility and poverty of the widow.*

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

<sup>41</sup>He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup>A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. <sup>43</sup>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. <sup>44</sup>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."

There is a story about three young guys who went to a new church on one Sunday morning. When it was time for the offering they discovered that neither one of them had any money at all. They were so worried and thought that the whole congregation would notice that they passed the offering plate without putting anything in it, and that would totally embarrass them. So, they came up with a plan. One of them pretended to faint and the other two carried him out.

This morning our Gospel text is the familiar one about the widow who puts two small coins in the temple treasury. Jesus says of this sacrifice: "Truly, I tell you this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 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." And though this has been used over the years to inspire some people to give more to the church, we must be careful not to trivialize this text into a guilt trip about the offering plate that is passed down the pews. The point Jesus makes directs us to think about priorities and trust.

One evening at a prayer meeting a preacher invited people to give testimony to their faith. A man in the front row stood up and told this story. "Many years ago, I fell on very hard times. I lost my job. My wife divorced me. I was out on the street with nowhere to live. In desperation I walked into a church and sat down and prayed. Then I took the very last dollar I had and put it in the offering. Penniless, I walked outside, only to run into an old friend of mine, who took pity on me and offered me a job with his company. I accepted it, became successful, and now I am a millionaire. All of this happened because of that night long ago I put all my trust in God, when I put all the money I had in the offering at church. You see it is

possibly to rely fully on God." When the man finished his story, the congregation was deeply moved and sat in silence for a while. Then a woman in the back row stood up and said to the man, "I dare you to do it again right now."

Trust. Priority. These are important dimensions of our daily living, our daily decisions, and our daily worship of God. Perhaps, we too, can recall events from the past that we can point and say, right there, right then, I completely turned it over to God. It is interesting that perhaps many of those stories occur when we have had no other choices. What about the same type of decisions when things are going well, when we are not down and out, when we feel the best about the new day as it arises. How then do we hear the rumblings of the Spirit that can say: "I dare you to do it again right now"?

The reality is that for many of us in this room, perhaps most of the time we may have been fortunate enough to not have experienced the lean moments of resources, at least over a long period of time. In fact, many are not using the phrase "making it stretch," instead we are more familiar with this phrase: "Supersize it!" Fast food operations hear that word thousands of times a day, giving the word "supersize" a new meaning in the ever-expanding English language. Why buy a regular combo meal when, for a few cents more, you can have it supersized? More french-fries to clog our veins. So much Coke that the colossal cup won't jam into the car's cup holder. Perhaps nowhere is the American supersized appetite for pop better evidenced than at any convenient store. Thirsty on your way to work? Stop in and buy a 64-ounce Big Gulp! Refills are free. Can we imagine Americans in the 50's drinking a 64-ounce Coke on the way to work? Instead some will remember those tiny 6 oz. Bottles. They seem

like toys now. Today's generation would have a hard time believing Coke was once marketed in those tiny bottles.

We know this is true. America has a preoccupation with supersizing. Consider the items in our grocery carts. How many of the products are extra flavor, super value, maximum strength, and new bigger family size. Then there is the store checkout line. We've carefully filled our cart with all the items on our list, that we believe we need. Then we pull our cart up to the checkout line and settle in for the wait. But before it's all said and done, our cart has more: a pack of gum, a box of Tic-tacs, the candy bar, a magazine for inquiring minds and if the children are along, we teach them that any want can be instantly satisfied. It's no accident. Stores clog the checkout line with junky, funky, consumer gunk because they know that we have the urge to supersize, to get the extra.

In our text from Mark, Jesus saw what was extra, what was supersized from a different angle. He saw the rich giving enormous sums to the temple treasury, and a poor widow giving two measly copper coins. This scene provoked those words Jesus. "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 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 praised the woman for her small, but heartfelt gift. What Jesus commends is not only the widow's gift itself, but also her supersized vision. Jesus extols her unselfish love and her vision of what her small gift can do. In other words, Jesus' point has not so much to do with how much is given, but rather in what priority, trust and spirit with which it is given. It is the challenge to see the extra mile in terms of not what we can take or get, but rather in what we give, in how we prioritize our entire life in all issues and areas.

There is a fable about six people who froze to death around a campfire on a bitterly cold night. Each had a log of wood they might have contributed to the fire, but for reasons satisfactory to themselves each person refused to give the piece of wood they held. A woman would not give her log of wood because there was a person not of her race in the circle. A homeless man would not give because there was a rich man there. The rich man would not give because his contribution would warm someone who he thought was lazy. Another would not give his log when he recognized one not of his particular religious faith. Another man withheld his piece of wood as a way of getting even with the others for all they had done to him. And the lone fire died out as each person withheld their piece of fuel for reasons justifiable to them. This story was originally told in a poem that ends with these tragic lines: "Six logs held fast in death's still hand was proof of human sin; They did not die from the cold without; they died from the cold within."

The widow in the Gospel text had a life position that Jesus holds up as an example for his disciples. How does this story affect us today? We have two distinct types of people in the account. The affluent teachers of the law who merely tip God, verse the poor widow, who gives all that she is able. With which group do we identify with? Which of the two is more like us?

Sometimes many of us need to be prodded to supersize our vision concerning our church's mission in the world, our congregation's mission, and our own role in carrying that out. Sometimes, it's easy to lose the larger picture of the church's mission in the day-to-day work of the church. Sometimes it is helpful for all of us to be reminded to connect what we are doing to the larger scope, the larger mission of the church. We at times

can recall that the resources that we offer this place actually make a difference in people's lives. Next Sunday, as part of our annual meeting we will be looking at a mission investment plan proposal and leadership direction for 2019. How do we show our priority? How do we demonstrate our trust? How by supersizing our vision do we supersize our direction, our trust, and our priorities? Amen.