

Proper 27 (23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost)  
November 8, a.D. 2009  
Mark 12: 38 – 44

It's that time of year for many churches and households to propose budgets, worry about deficits and take time to think about how we are going to handle what God has given to us.

Before us today are two contrasting examples of giving to the Lord. The scribes, on the one hand, gave large sums and then on the other, there is this poor widow who gave two small copper coins, the smallest in usage.

Worshippers, usually the rich, came to the temple to give their offerings of money into a repository in order to give to the poor. Both the donating into the temple treasury and the distribution to the poor afterwards, was supposed to take place in secret.

But it didn't happen that way. The teachers of God's Law were quite happy for others to notice how much they put into the temple treasury. How impressive when they showed up with large bags of money that came crashing down to the bottom of the box with a loud and proud thud! They were not opposed when others found out how much they gave to the Lord. So much for the saying that what you give, is between you and the Lord!

Now the Lord Jesus happened to be in His temple and noticed how much was given to Him. He could see with his eyes the large amounts given by the teachers of the Law and the two small copper coins given by the poor widow.

It became a teaching moment when he called his disciples and said that the poor widow gave more than the others. The Lord thinks and calculates so differently than we do. He based his statement on how much was left over after giving to the Lord. The rich had lots left over. The poor widow had nothing left. She gave all she had, 100%. Nothing was left. No money to buy food, clothing or to pay taxes.

Not only does God look at what's left after we give to him, he also looks deep inside us and looks at why we give in the first place. The teachers of the Law were more concerned with impressing others and making themselves worthy of their seats of honour, and the praise that came with their positions of authority.

They had no other jobs but to rely on rich benefactors and so abuses of their office soon followed. They prayed long prayers to impress others but these were short on faith. With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility. Jesus said they will receive greater condemnation.

Jesus gives us fair warning here not to use religion to elevate ourselves above others. The alarm bells are clanging here for pastors. Don't think your positions, or knowledge or way of life makes you any better than anyone else. Humility, service and sacrifice are to be the hallmarks of their vocations. God shows no partiality. An usher in the church is no less pleasing to God with his gift than a preacher of the Word, when they both serve in the same faith and humility. In this way they remain free from the poison of vainglory.

The widow gave all she had. Nothing was left over for herself. There was no danger in her life of her possessions controlling her. She could not be a slave to her wealth and possessions because she had none!

Faith means hanging on God's promise alone. We are not told in holy scripture what her plan was to get her next meal. Faith doesn't need such things. It simply believes. We are told to count the cost of stewardship and to plan for the future, but this is not the place where faith lives.

It breathes in the promise of God. The arrogant world despises God who commanded the widow of Zarephath to give her last meal to Elijah instead of herself and starving son. The arrogant world despises the God who watches the poor widow give him all she had and doesn't rush in and stop her and say, "You don't have to do that, I've got enough thank you very much, here take your money back and I will fill your bank account."

God didn't do that. He accepted her offering as he did Abel's. It was given in faith. How can our attitudes, motives and secret inner life ever match up to hers? Which of us can say we have given all our money and possessions to the Lord? Even the widow was not saved because she did that!

There is only one who had such pure selfless motives, filled with perfect love for you and for his father in heaven. Jesus. His heart was tested. His motives were tried by the fires of cruel hell itself. He came out perfectly clean and poor and made himself very

poor on the cross to make you rich toward God. He made you God's treasured possession and freed you from the strong hold that your pride, arrogance and hypocrisy had on you. You are free from these. You are loved.