

Rev. Karen Graham – Church of the Redeemer  
November 8, 2009  
Mark 12: 38-44  
Giving More Than Enough

We'll start out with a couple of stories:

One Sunday a family was driving home from church. They all started to make comments about the worship service. The father said: "I sure didn't like the minister's sermon today. It was awfully boring." The mother said: "How about those hymns they picked out? I couldn't sing any of them". But then the son chimed in saying, "It wasn't all that bad. After all, what do you expect for a dollar?" (C. Edward Bowen, "Do You Want to Add Your Two Cents?" Lectionary Homiletics, vol.XX, Number 6, p. 54).

Garrison Keillor tells about a Sunday morning in Lake Wobegon Lutheran Church. The sermon has been droning on far too long, and Clarence Bunsen has checked out early. He realizes it's almost time for the offering, so he quietly reaches for his wallet. Upon opening his wallet, Clarence discovers he has no cash. He takes out his pen and hides the checkbook in the middle of his Bible, next to one of the psalms. He begins to scratch out a check for \$30, because he almost had a heart attack that week and because somebody in the church will count the offering and he wants them to see he gave thirty dollars. He tries not to be obvious, but a lady to his right sees him. Clarence can tell she thinks he's writing in the pew Bible, so he doesn't look at what he's doing. She gives him a funny stare, and turns back to the sermon. Clarence tries to quietly rip the check out of the checkbook, with limited success, still not looking at what he's doing so the lady in the pew won't know he has written out a check in church. The offering plate comes by, and Clarence proudly puts in the check, only to realize a moment too late that he has written a check for three hundred dollars. He accidentally wrote three-zero-zero on two different lines when he wasn't looking. What could he do? On the one hand, he couldn't go downstairs after church and find the deacons counting the collection and say, 'Fellows, there's been a mistake. I gave more than I really wanted to'. On the other hand, he gave all he had in the checking account and a little more. Perhaps he and his family will have to eat beans and oatmeal for the rest of the month, Clarence thought, even though the contribution was going to a good place. One thing was for sure, notes Keillor. In that moment, Clarence felt fully alive for the first time all day". (Garrison Keillor, Leaving Home, New York: Penguin Books, 1987, pp. 90-91).

Which father was more like the widow in today's gospel story? The one who put in a dollar and then complained about the service, or the one who gave \$300 instead of \$30 and then felt fully alive?

Last week we did a little dance to illustrate how we are to give our whole selves. Put your whole self into your faith, we said --- give God all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind and all of your strength. Don't hold any part of yourself back. Well, today, the gospel message builds on that same theme. Don't just skim off the top and give out of your abundance. Give from your heart and give God more than what you think is enough. Why did the widow give both of her coins? Was she required to give that much? No --- if those coins really represented all that she had, she was not expected to give so much. But she gave them anyway. Why? Because the Temple was good to her? Probably not -- because how did the Temple treat poor widows back then --- not so well. She wasn't an important member of the faith community. In fact it's redundant to say "poor widow" at all --- because to be a widow back in Jesus' day was to be poor. Widows held no status in that society. And the leaders of the Temple took advantage of all poor people --- which is what Jesus is condemning in the first part of today's reading from Mark's gospel, when he warns his disciples about the scribes: "They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation". So, it probably wasn't because the Temple took good care of her that the widow gave all that she had. Why else then did she do it? We don't know. But she wanted to --- it was her gift, and she gave it freely and openly. She gave sacrificially. She gave more than enough.

The rich people who gave that day gave larger amounts of money -- but in comparison, their gift did not represent as much to them as those two coins did to the widow. They wouldn't feel the pinch of their gift --- their lives wouldn't necessarily be changed by their gift --- they could still wear their fine clothes, and go home to their houses and their servants and their important place in the community. But not that widow --- her gift cost her much. Yet still she gave it. Still she gave it.

A Presbyterian minister tells the story of a woman who came out of the shadows one Sunday morning just as the worship service was coming to an end. She had two little boys in tow, and told the usher she wanted to talk to the pastor, and she wanted to pay her tithe. The usher explained to her that since she wasn't a member of the church she didn't have to give any money. But the woman insisted. So after the benediction she was taken up front where she sat in the front pew and spoke with the minister. She had spent several nights with her sons in a battered woman's shelter and they were all leaving the next morning on bus to Atlanta to start a new life. She was leaving behind her friends and family. She had made arrangements to live in a shelter until she could find a job, get back in school, or somehow get her life in order. "Before I leave", she said, "I want to have you pray for me and I want to pay my tithe". She pulled out all the money she had in the world, counted out ten percent of it, and handed it to the stunned pastor. The total was \$30.56. "You can't give this to us", protested the pastor. "You need it. It can make a difference for you and your boys". "You don't understand", said the woman. "Even if I kept that ten percent, I wouldn't have enough money to provide for me and my sons. So I want to give it to God. I trust God will give me a new life. To show him I trust him, I want to give my money". And she did.

Contrast that story with the one another preacher tells of a church member who was challenged by his pastor to give. The member said, “If I only had some extra money, I would gladly give it to the church, but I just can’t seem to make ends meet for my family”. He went on to say “If I just had some more time, I would be faithful in church and assume responsibility in it, but I have such long hours that there is simply no time to do anything”. And then he added, “I wish I had some talent that I could use to serve the Lord in the church. But I have no talent. I can’t sing, or teach, or do anything. And it grieves me”. Well, it seems that God gave this man more money, and more time, and a talent with which to serve Him, and then God waited. But the man did nothing, so God took it all back. Then the man said, “Of, if only I had those things back that God gave me, I would really serve Him this time, “ And God said, “Oh, be quiet”. (Eric Ritz, “The Noteworthy Witness of a Widow), [www.sermons.com](http://www.sermons.com)).

The focus of our stewardship campaign this month is on the need of the giver to give rather than the need of the church to receive. And the need for us to give with what we already have, not what we hope to have someday. Giving is part of who we are, and if we are going to give our whole selves, then giving our money is included. I hope you see that connection. The widow in today’s gospel story didn’t hold back, did she? She trusted God with her whole life, and with her whole livelihood. She gave because it was in her to give. She gave because she loved God with all her heart and soul and mind and strength. For her it wasn’t a matter of figuring out how much she owed, or how much the Temple needed. She gave all she had because to her that represented her love for God.

As the weeks go by this month, we’ll be asked to consider what **our** love for God is calling **us** to give. There will be more information and more conversation about all this in the weeks to come. But today we get an example of giving that sets the stage for what lies ahead. It’s an example of giving God our whole selves in a way that really challenges us. And it reminds of Jesus himself, doesn’t it? And maybe that’s why Jesus could see what he saw in her – because maybe he could see himself in her. As another writer puts it, “Here was a woman who refused to play it safe; and neither did Jesus ever play it safe. She did not, could not, hold anything back from God; neither would he. She gave away all she had; and according to the Gospel of Mark, within a few days of leaving that temple, Jesus himself would give everything away. ‘Look at her’, he said. ‘Take a good, hard look....because her sacrifice is a picture of what you’re going to see God do in me” (William Carter, “Commitment Beyond Calculation”, [www.sermons.com](http://www.sermons.com)).

With Jesus, we have been given more than enough, haven’t we? God’s love has been shared with us in ways that are more than sufficient, more than enough – right? Is God’s forgiveness partial? Is God’s mercy limited? Is God’s grace appropriate or amazing? Is God’s love conditional or unconditional? Does the good news of Jesus Christ get used up or run out? Of course not. Giving more than enough isn’t an external requirement forced on us. It is an internal response --- it is simply how givers give who love God with everything they are and with all that they have. May this way of

giving become our way --- giving not just what's expected, but giving more than enough.  
Like the widow. Like Jesus. Amen.