

Pentecost 23, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Mark 12: 41 – 44

The sermon text this morning is the Gospel lesson I just read—it seems in verse 41 there were some offerings given by “the crowd,” offerings which were quite sizable but which somehow didn’t impress Jesus all that much. And then there were two copper coins put in the plate by a widow, *a penny*, which even in those days was only worth, *a penny*—and Jesus compliments her! He commends her for being the most generous one of all—because “she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

The Word of God. And we pray:

Father we thank you for all the good gifts that fill our lives, and we pray on this day not for more of the same, not for more stuff; but simply for more faith. Help us trust you fully and completely with our money, and with our lives, and draw our hearts closer to yours, today and everyday. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.

A few thoughts, a few questions. Some reflections on today’s Gospel story of the widow, the crowd, and their offerings on that long ago day.

#1. Trusting God is easy, till you actually have to do it. Again, trusting God is easy, till you actually have to do it, the woman in the story had nothing in this world, to be honest. She was single, poor, older, and female—three strikes and you’re out, and in the world of that day there’s four strikes right there. All she had left, was God. God was *all* she had left, so was faith easy for her? Was trusting the Lord a snap? Nothing about this woman’s life was easy, I think. But from the story it appears, she had learned—she had learned she could trust God, and she did! Circumstances in

life had forced her to her knees in prayer, and God had listened; hard experience had opened her heart to the Lord, and the Lord had come and filled it up, she had learned she *needed* to trust God. Life had taught her that. *And then she learned she could*—God is faithful, God does come through—trusting God may not have been easy for this woman either. But she had discovered, it can be done. It works!—and the ultimate expression of her trust in God. Was putting that last penny in the offering plate. “My life really is in your hands Lord. I trust you in this as in all things. I know you will come through for me in the end.”

The crowd, in verse 41. They certainly believed in God, and they made generous offerings, no question about that. They had faith, but they also had a pretty good life and a pretty stable routine, they had God. But they had God, at arm’s length? They had faith, at a safe distance. Life was pretty good for them, they had God in their lives, sure. But in the background somewhere. And the expression of that *distance* in the story today, was they way they made *their* offerings—measured. Reasonable. Controlled. Generous. But safe.

This is not a plea for money. My sermon today is not going to turn into a stewardship appeal for more cash. Instead it’s an appeal for faith. Every one of us believes in God, every one of us has faith in Christ, but most of us are

like the crowd in verse 41—faith is safe. Jesus is there, but kept at arm's length. "We trust you God," but not like this widow did—because somehow, we don't have to just yet? You will. Life is not always safe, life does that to all of us eventually, there will be a moment when like this widow you realize—God is all you have. Jesus, is the only one there for you. Now He will come through—He always does—but the point is, maybe today, you can look at your faith. Maybe today you can begin to pray "Jesus, move me from the crowd. And as you did for this widow, deepen my walk with you as well. Deepen my walk with you now Lord, while there's time. And stay with me too, when my hour of need comes. As it surely will"

#2. The crowd in verse 41 gave lots of gold, but let's face it, God has all the gold He needs. Streets in heaven are paved with gold, so I'm told, it's not like He has a shortage. Likewise all the wealth of this world—God made the world, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, what can we give the Lord in the offering plate that He doesn't already have? God doesn't need your money, God isn't looking for your money, He is however looking for your heart. The one thing *you* have to give that no one else has, and God can't get anywhere else—your heart. Your faith. Your life.

We give our little children massive presents at Christmas, don't we? We give them massive presents at Christmas and they give us crayon drawings.

Ok mom, honest, would you really rather have a massive present? Isn't that crayon drawing, and what it represents, the very thing you were looking for? So also here. Massive offerings were dropped in the plate in verse 41, well that's special, but the woman gave her heart. Isn't that what our heavenly Father has always been waiting for? Isn't that what He wants, from you?

Again this sermon is not a plea for money. Now I'm not going to say you *can't* give more, or that it's a bad thing to give a massive amount—no I'm, not going to say that. But I will say that before it's ever a matter of money, it's a matter of the heart. If your heart is with Jesus, your hands will be there too, we'll see it in how you live. If your heart is with Jesus your mouth will be there too, and we'll hear it in how you speak. And if your heart is with the Lord, the wallet in your hip pocket will be there too, the giving will come. Just work on the heart, that's the thing. You, the Lord, your heart; today.

Finally, this is Jesus talking in the Gospel today, and let's remember what we know about Jesus. Unlike the crowd, Jesus didn't play it safe. Unlike the crowd, Jesus didn't keep us at arm's length, or in the background somewhere, but instead He came down to earth in person to save us. He didn't just offer a massive present, or a generous gift of some kind. Instead He poured out His heart; He gave His very life! Every moment of His every

day on earth, Jesus offered up in service to others, right up to the Friday afternoon He died on a cross to forgive you; and the Sunday morning He rose from the dead to save you. And on this day now, He is not remotely distant, He is not floating through heaven merely sending you His warmest regards. Rather He is here, as always, to forgive and restore. To renew and make whole. To guide and direct, to invade your life when you'd rather keep Him at a distance. To be there for you, when you know there's no one else. To be your Savior and Lord this day, and forever—that's Jesus Christ; and may it be so for all of us, in Jesus' name, AMEN.