

### **Warning Against the Teachers of the Law**

**38** As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, **39** and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. **40** They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

### **The Widow’s Offering**

**41** Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. **42** But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

**43** Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. **44** They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

We continue in action packed Mark this week. We find Jesus at the temple, watching as people dropped off their offerings. The temple offerings were collected in trumpet-like urns. It is believed there were 13 of them, each marked to indicate what the offering was for, whether it was for the temple tax, or bird offerings or whatever, but some were strictly free will offerings over and above the minimum taxes and offerings. From what Mark tells us, one can imagine the outwardly righteous throwing their coins in these free will offering trumpets, throwing the coins hard so that they would clink, sounding the trumpet as it were, and show to all how much these wealthy religious men had given.

Jesus watches, but is unimpressed. At least until a widow comes along with two meager coins. Now widows faced a hard life in Jesus’ time. With no male relative to work and provide for them, they were often destitute. In fact we are admonished to care for the widows at several points in the New Testament, to ensure that they were fed and cared for. This widow has only two coins to live on. Giving even one would be a hardship, but she puts in both. These two little coins don’t clink and clank. They slid down with little noise, and likely drowned out by the noise of the crowded courtyard. I imagine the wealthy scoffing at her meager offering. They perhaps looked down on her, or at the very least, figured her contribution didn’t mean much. If her two little coins had fallen on the ground I doubt any of the wealthy there would have bothered to pick them up.

But Jesus watches. The wealthy gave out of their abundance. When you have plenty of money, what it is to give some of it away? I don’t think millionaires are particularly worried about putting some twenties in the offering plate. Yet Jesus

knows that this poor woman has too little already, and of what she had, she gave it to God.

God sees both of these offerings. God saw the offering of the wealthy that makes a big show and look impressive. I think most of us would be fairly impressed if we saw someone dumping in piles and piles of bills into our offering plates. God also saw the quiet offering of the widow, the two pennies in the offering plate we might find less impressive. Yet of these two, it is not the big, showy gift that Jesus lifts up. It is the gift of a poor, unnamed widow, who gave deeply from her heart and trusted God to provide.

We no longer have trumpet shaped urns to call attention to our offerings, but that doesn't mean we don't sometimes compare ourselves to our brothers and sisters, much as that widow and the wealthy men around her surely did.

Today is Stewardship Sunday for us at Trinity and for many other churches as well. Some churches will enter this season confident, launching campaigns for big, showy new projects, new buildings, more smoke machines, Jumbotrons and the like. Some will be gathering funds for exciting ministry expansions, like soup kitchens and shelters. Others, many, will be just hoping to survive another year, to keep the lights on, and the bills paid. Others will be dreading a big repair that could wipe out what little they have.

Maybe we don't sound a trumpet with our offerings, but in the age of tv and social media it is easier than ever to compare ourselves to others. It is easy to look at other churches and other people with their big projects and buildings and amenities and wonder whether our offerings will make any difference, much like a certain widow might have wondered, as she dropped her two coins into an urn full of contributions that vastly outnumbered hers.

The wealthy were giving just to look good, for the praise of men. The widow was giving out of love and obedience and trust in God. With those two pennies in the offering urn, she had to fully depend on God to meet her every need. Most people would have held on to those coins out of a sense of self preservation, but this woman heard the call of God and gave, and obeyed, and trusted. And her contribution accomplishes more than any of the wealthy hypocrites that gave that day. You probably haven't heard a lot of people talk about the contributions of the wealthy hypocrites at the temple, but I'm willing to bet that the Widow's mites are a familiar story. I'm willing to bet you or someone you know has had their heart touched by her story.

The wealthy hypocrites were able to give large sums of money but they missed the point entirely. God is not about the numbers. If God needs money, I assure you, God can and will raise it up. I don't know how many times I've heard stories of ministries needing a certain amount of money that just shows up unexpectedly. I've even experienced that myself, when I was a starving seminary

student. Our God can bring forth abundance out of nothing if God so chooses, and our God is also a God of multiplication. God loves to take very little and turn it into something exponentially bigger and better. Jesus takes a couple small loaves and small fish and feeds five thousand, Jesus takes water and turns it into the finest wine, time and again in the Bible resources are multiplied by God to not run out, whether it's oil or flour, or even sunlight. God could take those two little pennies from the widow and multiply them to do more than that widow, standing there maybe a little embarrassed and definitely destitute, could have ever imagined. God does not care about the numbers. God cares about the heart. Giving is about us, and what it does to us, how it changes us and others, than bottom lines and green ink. The heart of that widow was far more important than the material riches the wealthy put in. God counts hearts, not coins, and if we listen to God's call, trust in God to provide for us, and give generously, God will do the rest. God will multiply our efforts.

Some may feel like they don't even have the two coins that the widow offered. I have experienced that first hand when I had to decide between food and keeping the lights on for another week, or trying to tithe. But coins are not the only thing that God can multiply. The temple in Jesus' time didn't have a whole lot of volunteer opportunities, but giving financially is not the only way to give back to God from the abundance God has given you. If you are here or watching us today, it is likely that God has blessed you in several material ways, but God has also blessed you in many other ways that are unique to you and can further the work of the church.

Maybe God blessed you with a singing voice, perhaps you could give of your time in the choir. Maybe God blessed you with secret knowledge and you know how to make the best cup of church coffee in North America, perhaps you are being led to give of your time and help caffeinate the congregation. Maybe you are gifted with a heart and passion for prayer, please, pray for Trinity, pray for Tom and I and the congregation and God will bless and multiply your efforts. Maybe you know how to get mystery stains out of carpet, or how to tame weeds, or even how to greet people on Sunday morning. The gift of your time and talents may not sound the trumpet like a bucket of coins might, but it is no less valuable, and if freely given, I promise that God can multiply even the gifts of your time and talents to do something incredible.

Today, let us remember that unnamed widow, who gave just two small coins, all that she had to live on, but who gave out of her deep faith and love for God, who obeyed God's call and trusted in God's care, and because of her faith, her two small pennies were multiplied beyond imagining, and are forever remembered and celebrated as part of our faith heritage.

Today we will receive the pledges for Trinity. Perhaps some of you are surviving on Ramen noodles and rice as I was during seminary, or perhaps you are wondering whether your contribution will even matter, or perhaps you feel hopeless when compared to the megachurches around town that could fit several of our entire building in their sanctuary. Jesus sees us. So long as you are listening to God, following God's call, whatever that might be, and trusting in God to provide, I assure you that God will multiply and do incredible things with whatever you give up to God today and every day. Perhaps you have talents and gifts and you are wondering if you could offer those to God today. Perhaps you wonder if you are good enough at whatever it is, or if it will make a difference, or if we will ever let you stop volunteering. I assure you that God's grace is sufficient, and that God has blessed each and every one of you with gifts and talents that can further God's kingdom and church in a way that no one else can, and God is willing and able to empower you and multiply your gifts and time. There are no unimportant people in the body of Christ.

Most importantly, God cares about our hearts and our faith far more than numbers. When we listen for God's call, when we give thanks to God for the gifts we have received and out of that praise give back to God, we are changing ourselves, our hearts, and through God's power, our church and our community. May we give however God calls us to today, freely, joyfully, trusting that God will multiply and will provide for all our needs this day and forever more. Amen.