

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Proper 27, Series B  
Saturday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
Sunday, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018 (Veterans Day)

Sermon: The Widow's Might (Reprise)<sup>1</sup>  
Text: Mark 12:38-44

Focus: God gives us everything we need.

Function: That they would joyfully give back to God through tithes and offerings to the Church.

Structure: Story-Applied

Locus: "I believe that God... richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life... For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him..." (SC, 1<sup>st</sup> Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus praises the poor widow's offering of two copper coins, each of which was worth less than a penny. From the King James Version of the Bible, we have come to call this offering the widow's "mite." The widow's offering may have been small. In absolute, mathematical terms, it was almost worthless compared to the "large sums" thrown into the collection box by the rich. Her offering amounted to about 7-8 minutes' worth of wages. At today's Colorado minimum wage rate (\$10.20 per hour), that would be about \$1.28. But in strictly *spiritual* terms, the poor widow gave more than anyone else that day. "Truly," Jesus says, "this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on" (Mark 12:43-44, ESV).<sup>2</sup>

The poor widow could only give two small copper coins; it was all she had. But it was *all* she had. So when the poor widow put her offering into the temple treasury, she gave 100%,

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revision of a sermon originally preached at Epiphany Lutheran Church on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

“all she had to live on,” or, as a literal translation of the Greek text indicates, “her whole life.”<sup>3</sup>

The poor widow held nothing back in her love for the Lord. When she heard the words of the psalmist, “How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?” (Ps. 116:12, NIV), she knew the answer was “nothing.” She couldn’t do anything to repay the Lord because you can’t out-give God, for he delights in giving gifts to his children. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (Jas. 1:17). And the greatest of all God’s gifts is his forgiveness of sins. The poor widow didn’t give because she was trying to earn or buy God’s favor and blessing. She gave because she recognized how abundantly blessed she was already—even in her poverty—because of God’s grace.

So at the start of our congregation’s stewardship series today, instead of focusing solely on the widow’s “mite,” spelled M-I-T-E, I want to talk about the widow’s *might*, spelled M-I-G-H-T. The widow’s offering may have been small in monetary times, but it was mighty in spiritual terms. God can do a lot with a little. With an offering of only five loaves of bread and two fishes, Jesus fed more than 5,000 people! Just think what he could do with the widow’s mighty mites, especially when her whole heart was in it—“her whole life”! (CSM). She gave out of gratitude for God’s grace and his provision. Even in her poverty, she was unafraid to give to God because she believed with all her heart that God is “the Father of the fatherless and the protector of widows... in his holy habitation” (Ps. 68:5). The poor widow offered her mighty mites because of the Mighty God who already gave everything to her.

The poor widow was one of those joyful givers God loves so much. As the Bible says, “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). (*Aside*: God loves a grumpy giver too, but they’re not as much fun to be around!). God wants cheerful givers, but not cheerleaders. Ostentation

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<sup>3</sup> Greek: ὅλον τὸν βίον αὐτῆς, *holon ton bion autēs*.

doesn't give God the glory. If you want a gold star, an "Atta, boy!", or your name on the wall, then apply elsewhere. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns against that kind of giving:

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy"—and notice how Jesus says *when*, not *if!*—"when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do..., that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matt. 6:1-4).

God doesn't want us to toot our own horns and boast about how much we give to God. The widow didn't give her gift to be seen by other people. By the way, as your pastor, *I* don't want to know how much you give either. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Jesus saw how much the widow sacrificed for the Lord's work—and he calls her blessed (cp. Luke 6:20).

Remember that the poor widow who puts \$10 in the offering plate might be giving a lot more than the wealthy man who puts in ten thousand dollars. It's possible that ten thousand dollars is just a drop in the bucket for a rich man. Or it might represent a tremendous sacrifice. I can't say; only God knows! Just search your heart, and you'll know the answer for you and your family.

In Romans 12, the apostle Paul urges us, "in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Rom. 12:1, NIV). God wants us to offer our whole self, our entire being, to love God and love our neighbor. You see, God doesn't want 1% or 10%. He wants 100%--*all of you!* That doesn't mean you have to liquidate your life savings and put all your money into the offering plate. But it *does* mean that when you give, you must love the Lord with your whole heart.

When I was serving my vicarage in Des Moines, Iowa, one of our parishioners came up to me after a stewardship sermon and asked, "Vicar Matthis, do I really have to give *ten* percent

to God?” After a brief pause, I replied, “No, you can give *more!*” My friend was asking the wrong question. In the Old Testament, God requires ten percent of your best fruits and first fruits as an offering to support the Lord’s ministry and kingdom work. 10% is the bare *minimum* that God expects of us. Let me ask you this: Did Jesus only give *you* the bare minimum? No, of course not! In Philippians 2, St. Paul writes:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, *though he was in the form of God*, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself ***nothing***, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

Jesus made himself *nothing*. He gave up everything for you. So do you still want to give him the bare minimum, more, or less?

We give to *God’s* glory, *not* our own! We don’t give to the church so that we can have our name engraved on a plaque. We give because God gave his only begotten Son to bear our sin and be our Savior. The Bible says, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). So also we *give* because he first gave his Son for us (John 3:16). We give because he first *forgives* us! Givers who give with that kind of attitude “get” it! We give because God gave first. He gave his Son Jesus to die on the cross to save us from our sins and wipe out a debt that we could never repay. God did this, not because we earned it or deserve it, but simply because he loves us.

St. Paul writes, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). So we give to God because we want to say, “Thank you!”—*not* because we want to say, “Hey, God! Look at me!” God is already looking. Jesus watched people putting money in the temple treasury. God also sees you putting your gift in the offering plate (or giving online at our

secure website!). God knows what he sees. His favor has everything to do with the cross of Christ and nothing to do with how much we put in the plate.

Everything you have belongs to God. He entrusted it to your stewardship, to your management. Now it's up to you to figure out what you're going to do with *your* mighty "mites." Maybe you will give them to the church. Maybe you'll give them to another charity or a homeless person. Maybe you'll just hoard them for yourself or waste them on worldly things or just throw them away. All that is up to you. I hope the Lord has blessed you abundantly so that you can give more than just two pennies in today's offering—but that's just *my* "two cents"!

What I *don't* want you to do is to hold back out of fear. Sometimes people worry that if they give to God, they won't have enough left to live on. But Jesus promises to take care of our needs. "Your Father in heaven knows that you need them" (Matt. 6:32). That's why we pray for daily bread in the Lord's Prayer. We shouldn't be afraid to give our tithes and offerings because God promises abundant blessings for those who give a full tithe—their first fruits and best fruits. "Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine" (Prov. 3:9-10; cp. Mal. 3:10). You'll never be able to out-give God. Jesus says, "Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38).

That's *not* karma, by the way! That's just the law of nature. You reap what you sow (cf. 2 Cor. 9:6). Jesus says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). And *no one*—absolutely no one—has given as much as Jesus. Ultimately, the widow's might was not her mites (her money). The widow's might was her Master and Messiah, the Lord Jesus who gave

up *everything* for her—and for us—by his death on the cross. To ***him*** be the glory forever! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.