

She Trusted God with All That She Had

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...

I always love telling the story of the mother who wanted to teach her daughter about being generous with the things of God – and so, she gave her daughter a dollar and a quarter – and the mother said, *“I want you to put whichever one you want in the collection plate (and then you can keep the other one for yourself)”*...

When the service was finished the mother asked her daughter what she ended up doing with the money... the little girl said, *“Well, I was going to give God the dollar – (but just before the collection plate was coming my way) I heard the pastor say, “God loves a cheerful giver” – and I knew that I’d be a lot more cheerful if I only gave the quarter”*...

You know, I read that little story this week and I laughed (because I think we’ve all been in that position before, haven’t we?) – a time when you’ve had the opportunity to give (and yet, you held back anyway)...

Maybe that’s why it’s been said that the biggest regrets that people have at the end of their lives (relate *not to what they have done* – but to what they’ve *failed to do* with the opportunities they had to do good)...

In fact, a few weeks ago I was asked to do a funeral for an 85 year old man... and as we were preparing for the service I asked the granddaughter if her grandfather had any regrets in life... and I will always remember what she said... she said, *“In the last ten years of his life my grandfather woke up every single day at 7 a.m., picked a fresh wild flower on his morning walk, and took it to my grandmother”*...

She continued, *“One morning, I decided to go with him to see her... And as he placed the flower on her gravestone, he looked up at me and said with tears in his eyes, ‘I just wish I had picked her a fresh flower every morning when she was alive... She really would have loved that.’”*

Another woman that I offered counsel to, mentioned that she had a friend who was admitted to the hospital for attempting suicide... and this woman said about her friend, *“She’s always listened to my petty problems and asked me how I was feeling... But I’m sitting here in tears now, and realizing that I rarely ever asked her how she was feeling (because she always seemed like she had the perfect life in my eyes).”*

And I share that with you this morning because opportunities to give of ourselves are always presented to us (and, as we know, there are also plenty of excuses that we can all come up with as to why we don't want to do it – or why *now* is not a good time – and we can all justify reasons for holding back)...

But do you know what I believe?... I believe that even in holding back (when that opportunity comes for us to give of ourselves – *to give something*) –if we hold back rather than give back - there's also a price to pay (and sometimes it's an even more costly price than if we had just given of ourselves in the first place)... and the price we have to pay is living life with regret...

And I can tell you one thing – that's what I struggle with even today... I regret not giving more of myself (when I had the opportunity to do so for my mom)... I really do!..

And so, I guess, the question then becomes, "Then why do we hold back?"... and why do we forfeit opportunities to be generous, or share, or to do good?... and why is it that we can all come up with all sorts of excuses as to why we shouldn't give (but plenty of reasons why we should receive)...

Well, according to Dietrich Bonhoeffer (who was eventually martyred in Germany during the Second World War for standing up to Adolph Hitler and standing up for what he believed in) said that "at the heart of every Christian who resists giving of themselves when asked to share (is really one who fails to have faith in what God can do)..."

In other words, when we fail to give, we fail to trust... "because", according to Dietrich Bonhoeffer – "everyone has something to offer"... time, talent, treasure (so that together we can be stronger in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ)...

You know, if you're here this morning and you're looking for me to preach a sermon with 'whips and chains' (or 'fire and brimstone') - you've come to the wrong place... and I know there are some preachers who feel the need to make people feel guilty (by telling them that they're not doing enough in serving God)...

and I suppose our story from Mark's Gospel is the perfect set-up for this type of preaching... because here you have a group of *well-off* people who give very little of themselves (contrasted with a poor, widow who gives all that she has to live on) – and the logical next step would be to use this text as a way to encourage a congregation to be more generous...

But if there was no angle or agenda (and no attempt at using guilt as a persuasive mechanism) would it still be possible to learn from this story as a Christian?... If you were to read it through the lens of faith?... would God have a message for us?

Well, I think there is – and I can tell you right now (that I don't think this is a story that's limited to a discussion about money)... in fact, I'm not even sure if money is the main reason that we find it in our Bible... but what I've been doing this week (as I've been working on my message) is really thinking about that poor widow... and I wonder:

What would motivate a person to be so generous?... so faithful?... and so willing to give all of herself to God (and not hold back)?... what would have motivated her to put 'all that she had to live on' in the temple treasury?...

And do you know what I think the answer is?... I think what that woman had (more than everyone else who had come to the temple that day) **was a heart that trusted God**... (and you're right – she wasn't rich, she probably wasn't pretty to look at, or sophisticated or an overly complicated soul) but what she had was faith (that in being generous she believed that God would still provide)...

And the Bible tells us that Jesus loved her for it... and I would imagine that Jesus loved her for it (because in giving of herself so freely and so faithfully) she was doing the same thing Jesus was going to do on the cross (in that she was giving herself away for the sake of others – which is the path *that every Christian who wants to know the love of God* must travel)... because to know Jesus Christ (is to know sacrifice)... it's the path that he led...

You know, every year (at this time) our congregation discusses the importance of stewardship... and the hope in discussing it (has nothing to do with making people feel guilty – or pressuring anyone to give of themselves)... but rather it is an invitation to think about how we live our lives (and it's an opportunity that God gives us to do good in the world)... because when we share our time, talent, and treasure with someone else (not only do our lives look more like the life of Christ – which is the goal of every Christian – but we also grow closer to the Lord and stronger as a congregation...

And yes, I suppose if we wanted to find an excuse as to why 'now' is not a good time to be generous towards others – or why we're not in a position to give (because we live on a budget)... or maybe you can think of an even better excuse... and I think if that's where we are in our faith (we can definitely talk

ourselves out of participating in mission – and we can put our faith on a back burner until we win the lottery)...

And yet, on the other hand – if we do participate it can help us do what that widow did... and that's – trust in God... trust that in being generous with time, talent, and treasure (we'll still have enough for ourselves – that God will still provide - and that we won't all go broke – and our bank accounts won't all be depleted)...

But what we will be doing is bringing two things together (what we say we believe about God – and our actions)... and I think when those two things come together (not only does it make God very happy) but it also helps us live without regrets... because when you give God your best (just like that widow did) the Bible tells us that Jesus looks upon us with love... and in giving yourself away (you're also imitating the same cross that *Jesus died on* for our sins)...

And as it says in Matthew 6:21, *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”*...

I want to close with something I think about from time to time (that I think compliments my message this morning)... it's about a little church (a lot like this one) who had recently recovered from a fire (and by the Grace of God) it was growing again... and to keep the momentum going the pastor was also leading the congregation through a capital campaign (in order to raise the funds for the building)...

Well, after the service a relatively new member went up to the pastor and said, *“Pastor – this is why I don't like coming to church... the church is always asking for money”*...

The pastor thought about it for a second and said, *“You know, you're right... the Church does ask for money”*... and then went on to say, *“Of course, there are many things that require money in this world (the Church is no exception)... in fact, I can remember when my first-born son was growing up (all the money that he cost us)... there were doctor bills, and food, and clothing, and toys, and vacations, and his education...”*

but then one day our son died – it was an experience I would hope you never have to go through – and now our son doesn't cost us anything... but through that experience I have learned something about life (and about ministry) – that wherever there is a need – whether it be a financial need or a simple need for a

helping hand (that is also a sign of life and growth and vitality)... and as long as you are part of a church that is asking (you should also praise God) because it's a sign of it being alive and a place where God's Light is still shining in this world of darkness" ...

And friends, I think that's true for us as well – because as difficult as the last year and a half have been – God is doing a new thing at Faith (not just with our renovations – but with our ministries as well)... and I truly believe that God is calling all of us (as a congregation and as a Church) to give of ourselves (so that we might continue to see God's light – here in this place)... but even more importantly, so that together we can grow strong once again as a church in the 21st Century

No, we're not looking to change the world – but what we can do is stop the world from changing us... and the way we do that (is by being generous today – and doing so, without regret...

May the blessings of God continue to be made known to this ministry (through the faithfulness of those who believe)... May we always have a heart for the poor and the vulnerable... and May the eyes of our Savior always be looking down upon us – with love!

In Jesus' name we pray!

Amen!