

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Hebrews 9:25-28, Psalm 127, Mark 12:38-44
November 8, 2015
David Teschner

The young pastor of a Baptist church just outside of Lynchburg was new and didn't yet know his congregation very well. A deacon in the church felt obligated to tell him that there was a woman in the congregation who had six children and was giving a significant tithe to the church, one he was sure she could not afford.

The deacon asked the pastor to please give the woman a visit and tell her that she needed to keep most of the money she now gave to the church to help feed, clothe and educate her children. He was to assure her that she needn't feel obligated to give so much, especially since her income was so modest.

The pastor called on the woman and shared the concern of the deacon. He informed her as graciously and supportively as possible that she was relieved of her responsibility to give.

The pastor couldn't help but notice that as he spoke tears were welling up in her eyes. Uncertain as to why the woman was crying, he asked her about it. She said, "I know you and Deacon Bruce mean well, but you are asking me to give up the last thing that gives my life dignity and meaning."

The young pastor learned a lesson that day that he would never forget. Giving and our need to give is a powerful force. We give as an appropriate response in thanksgiving for all that we have received. When we can give, we have something valuable to share with others. This woman believed that she and her children were valuable, and, therefore, fit to contribute like everyone else.

Joan Chittister, in her book, Gospel Days, wrote, "Everyone we meet in life is on a mission to teach us something new."

This was certainly true for that young pastor when he visited the poor mother of six.

Jesus knew the truth of Chittister's words as he constantly learned from and elevated the least in his society whether it was women, children, Gentiles, tax collectors, sinners or the disabled like blind Bartimeus, whom we read about two weeks ago.

This morning Jesus directs our attention to a first century poor widow. Initially, however, he warns of the scribes who warrant popular acclaim and attention because they are very knowledgeable about the Jewish scriptures and wear fancy clothes to prove it. They get preferential treatment everywhere they go and thrive on being held in high esteem. We might

say from what Jesus tells us about them that that they have ravenous egos. The phrase “devour widows’ houses” suggests that they abused their position to exact payments from widows that these single moms were least able to give.

Jesus goes on to mention the rich who were able to make large contributions to the temple treasury. People in the temple would have noticed these big givers because the receptacles to receive the money were wide metal openings in the shape of a horn. The coins made a loud noise as they were poured into the tubular receptacles. Bystanders may have even oohed and aahed as the loud clanging went on and on.

In stark contrast, Jesus notices a poor widow slip by and put in just two small copper coins. They probably hardly made a sound except for a faint tinkle. Furthermore, because she was a woman and undoubtedly was dressed simply, no one would have taken notice of her meager offering. To everyone except Jesus, she was invisible, and her contribution was inconsequential, one might even say pathetic.

What strikes me most about today’s gospel is that Jesus alone notices the widow’s offering, which as it turns out, is more substantial than anyone else’s because it is everything she has. Her two pennies turn out to be the largest gift even if it is the smallest amount.

God sees things we don’t. God thinks differently about things than we do. God knows about real giving and real love and real devotion that may never be recognized by the press or the populace. God smiles every time we do the least kind act for another.

In our culture, people get recognized for giving the largest amounts. They get buildings and athletic facilities named after them. They get their names and gifts listed in publications and on plaques. We’ve even been known to do it in the church because it encourages other gifts. God knows that colleges and universities as well as churches and other worthy causes need large contributions. The temple in Jesus’ lifetime needed the rich to contribute vast amounts for upkeep and to provide for the priests who performed the sacrifices.

Here Jesus is not critical of the rich, but he wants to highlight others, even the poor who can be equally if not more generous. God knows better than anyone else that small gifts are just as important, and often the givers deserve more praise because the gift is truly sacrificial. That is when it is given with great love and without any expectation of recognition.

When Jesus said elsewhere to give without your right hand knowing what your left hand was doing, he was, in effect, saying, “Let your gift be entirely anonymous, known only to God.”

Here at Christ and Grace, we have just raised over \$95,000 to replace our worn-out windows. Truly, every gift, large or small, is most appreciated by me and the vestry. As our yearly every

member canvass kicks off this week, again, every pledge to the church will be received with gratitude. I don't know a single person or family in this church that demands special recognition for their offerings of time, service or treasure to Christ and Grace. That's a wonderful thing.

The ability and desire to give whatever we can for most of us is reward enough. Giving is its own return gift, you might say. God, the ultimate giver, made us to be givers as well, and we are our truest and best divine selves when we give freely of ourselves in our many capacities.

In today's gospel, Jesus is once again teaching us to look beyond or perhaps below the glitter and the glow of the rich, the famous and the celebrity to notice the little people living ordinary lives, who do small things with great faith and trust in God's care and concern for them.

Even more than what we have, God mostly wants our hearts and our love. Living each day knowing God has given the world to us and sent his Son for us and given us the Spirit to be joined to both Father and Son is pretty amazing.

It is even possible that this little woman is teaching Jesus about giving and being an example for him. After all, in just a few days, Jesus will be asked to give all that he has, his very life and last breath for us. AMEN.