

## **ALL THAT WE GIVE – Commitment Sunday, 11/8/2015**

**Scripture:** Mark 12:41-44 (42)

NO UNISON: After Lord's Prayer we will do the **PRESENTATION OF PLEDGES** \*\* Debbie, look at what we called it last year, I feel like there was a better term but can't put my hand on it at the moment

**Hymns:** 1) 495 "Called as Partners in Christ's Service 2) We Plow the Fields (insert) 3) 530 "God Our Author and Creator"

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

Leader: Come to God's house with your hopes and joys.

People: We bring our thanks and praise.

L: Come to God's house with your gifts and treasures.

P: We offer our lives to Christ.

L: Come to God's house with all that you have and with all that you are.

All: Let us worship together this day.

### **INVOCATION AND LORD'S PRAYER**

Gracious God, pour your love and your Spirit upon us, so that we may recognize our abundance. Free us from all that holds us back, so that we may offer our love and our lives to you in gratitude. In Christ's name we pray: "Our Father...."

### **SERMON**

**I wrote two sermons this week**, this one and one for last Wednesday's worship at Fox Run. It's always interesting to put together two pieces of scripture and see how they speak to each other. The Fox Run sermon was about the Beatitudes – Jesus calling us blessed in all kinds of circumstances, good and bad. **It was about Jesus raising the question - when are you blessed? And Jesus providing the answer - always.** So following Jesus is not about earning blessings; it's about how we respond to the blessing. **And this idea of responding to blessing is where this story about the widow at the money box comes in.**

At first it seems so obvious, right? This is a story about stewardship of money. **The old “give ‘til it hurts” story....**look at her. But is it really responsible to tell people to make themselves destitute for the sake of God's work, for the church? It isn't. And by the time he's at the temple watching people, Jesus has already characterized the money-gathering of the priests as turning the house of God into a den of thieves, taking advantage of the poor and their faith.

**So if it's not an example of how to be a complete steward by giving it all up, what is this story about, really?**

The start of that answer is to remember that although these stories have been through lots of editing in the telling and in the writing down, they have their origins in real people. **This story is NOT a parable! This story, and the others about the people around Jesus, show us something of what it is to follow Jesus. They are invitations, not moral illustrations. And what this woman illustrates is what it is to offer YOUR WHOLE LIVING** – that is, your whole life, all the things you do, all the things you try to be – to the purposes of God's righteous realm.

So this passage demonstrates Stewardship all right—but not particularly of money. **It is about how we are stewards of ALL THE REST – our whole lives.** Our “whole living” is what Jesus is calling us to offer—and is what the widow gave. Yes, the two coins are the example – all that she had to live on – but as we well know, **the gospels and Jesus' own teaching methods often stretch from the everyday to the eternal.** Jesus came to teach and lead, but not only that. He came to offer himself as a sacrifice, to show what it is to be completely utterly inhabited by God, to be completely devoted to God's righteousness, to completely trust in God. And in giving himself, it is not Jesus, the guy from Nazareth, but Emmanuel—God with us. **God gives it all for us, and calls us to give of ourselves for the sake of others. The Jesus path that we are called to follow is about whole life giving AND whole life living. Discipleship.** Being the Body of Christ for the world.

So....that's the widow's story. **What is our story?** What is our whole living? **What would it be like to give ourselves to God in discipleship ?**

Advent is coming! I know! It makes me shudder too! – but three Sundays from today, Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>, we start the whole cycle of the church year once again. We will hear from prophets who

abandoned their whole lives to preach God's word, from Isaiah to John the Baptist. We will hear about Mary, who was very much asked to give up her whole living to become the mother of Jesus - God with us, Emmanuel. We will think about Joseph, who had to let go of how he thought it would be, and even WHAT he thought would be, in light of this thing God was doing. We relish those stories.

**Hearing them alongside this story raises the question: what might it look like for us to offer not only our money for the work of the Kingdom but also OURSELVES?** There are as many ways as there are people in our church. And we need all of those ways, all of those people whom God has gathered together.

Starting in Advent this year, I invite you to join in a special project. **We'll have a selection of "try three" activities, and the invitation, between the start of Advent and Easter Sunday, to take on three new ways of service to God's Kingdom.** Three ways for each of us, young and old, members and friends, to share ourselves for the sake of the world. Two little coins provided an example that is still alive and at work two thousand years later. **What might three actions from each of us here provide?? You do the math. It could be a lot.** And it could lead each of us to something that we never tried before but discover to be something that we will continue to do to share God's love and care with our world.

We are followers of Jesus. We know how he gave everything, not just his livelihood but his very life, for the sake of all people. So in this season, let's prepare ourselves for a time of thanksgiving....and thankful living too. Just a few steps at a time. A couple of coins. Three things on your to-do for God list.

Will you pull out your inserts with the second hymn, "We Plow the Fields and Scatter" please? And let's read that last verse, verse 3, as a unison prayer to wind it up on this Commitment Sunday –

We thank thee, then, O Father, for all things bright and good:

The seed time and the harvest, our life, our health, our food.

Accept the gifts we offer, for all thy love imparts, and, what thou most desirest,

Our humble, thankful hearts.

All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above; then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love. Amen!