

23rd Sunday after Pentecost - November 8, 2009

Sermon Title: "A Sacrifice of Staggering Proportions"

Sermon Text: Mark 12:44-48

41 And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. 43 And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. 44 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."

Sermon Hymn: "The Temple Rang with Golden Coins" [LSB 787]

Prayer: May the Lord's offering on the tree remain deep in our hearts.

Sermon Outline:

- I. Given in anticipation of an even greater Sacrifice (vv. 41, 42).
- II. Commended by the Lord (vv. 43, 44).

Grace, mercy, and peace to each and everyone of you from God our Father, and from Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord. Amen.

A couple of weeks ago I ran into a gentlemen who lives here in Springfield. I had had a number of conversations with him before. I've never known a lot about him and his life, except, of course, what he has told me. He's a very pleasant individual, and always concerned and caring toward others. Yet, at the same time, any inquiry I made about his life and how he was doing would always dig deep at my heart. Things weren't going so well for him. His job life, family life, living situation, all of it seemed to be, at least in comparison to my own, in shambles.

The thing of it is, after every time I got to visit with him, I got to thinking to myself, "I should have shared more of the Lord's Promise with him." Every time I did talk to him it was clear to me He needed the Lord's peace. Now, I wonder, will I ever have another chance? And, I keep saying to the Lord, "Lord, you gave me opportunity after opportunity to proclaim to this man what you have done for him, and each time I have failed." My prayer is, of course, that things are going better for him, but also that either I have another opportunity, or someone else does, to share Jesus Christ with him. Who doesn't need Jesus Christ?

I just wanted to tell about that before we dig into our Gospel reading for this Sunday because I really think there is a connection. To help bring out this connection let's think about verses 41-44 of our Gospel. Jesus was in the Temple and He sat down opposite of the treasury. He was watching, observing is a better way to put it, people putting their money into the offering box. What He

observed were many rich people putting large sums of money in, and then there was the poor widow who put in two small copper coins. One commentator on this text defines the occurrence as a “careful observation by an interested observer”. Jesus was watching carefully with full interest of who was putting what into that box.

What’s easily seen in our Gospel reading is the sharp contrast between the rich and the poor. Thing of it is, in Jesus’ teachings, a rich man seldom appears who is not living proof of the dangers of wealth. Back then, and still today, there are the rich and there are the poor among us. Is it bad to be rich? Is it good to be poor? Or, are these the wrong questions to ask? If Jesus was observing all these people, what was He observing about them? Was He observing one of those heart things that only He, as God Almighty, could observe?

Reading through a text like it is very easy to begin to think Jesus is saying it is bad to be rich and good to be poor. If we’re able to get passed that too easy of an interpretation, then we have to decide what constitutes being rich. What makes a man rich? What makes a man poor?

I say, we look at this text, and we hear what Jesus is teaching us, just the way Mark presents it to us. Yes, Mark does present the contrast of the rich and poor, but for the reason of bringing out the proportional giving that each.

That is easily explained this way. The poor widow gave two very small copper coins, that was worth only a fraction of a penny. These were not valuable coins. It took two of these Jewish coins to equal one smallest Roman coin, the *quadran*. There were four *quadrans* in an *as*. There were sixteen *as* in a *denarius*. And, a *denarius* was a day’s wage for an ordinary working man. So, what this woman gave was hardly anything compared to what others were giving. Yet, if we hear what Jesus observed about it, it was a huge sacrifice on her part. If Jesus had not said so we would not know that what she was giving was all that she had. She was giving her last meal’s worth of her wealth.

A sacrifice of staggering proportions is what she gave. That’s what Jesus was observing, and that is what He was teaching the disciples about. Let’s put ourselves into the shoes of those disciples because it’s rather interesting to consider the possible thoughts and tendencies they had at this time. They were sitting in the Temple, the Temple. How easy it would have been for them to point out to Jesus how impressive the Temple was. “Look at this place, Jesus. This is for God!” Jesus was there,

though, to teach them a wonderful lesson, a lesson about something lowly, like the birds or a shepherd, like a little child, or a mustard seed.

Yes, for those rich that Jesus observed, it was expected of them to give the large sums that they did. Jesus didn't criticize them for that. He just simply stated that they all gave out of their abundance, but He also made clear that the widow gave all she had. What Jesus observed was the content of her heart. She was trusting and willing. And, that brought tremendous joy to our Lord's heart. And, that's why He wanted to teach the disciples this lesson. The Lord loves what was in this widow's heart- full trust and faith in the Lord. She did not worry about how she would pay for food the next day, but she trusted the Lord would provide that when the time came.

Another way to put it, what Jesus observed was her response. Her response to what though? Was she possibly responding to what others were giving and she knew she had to give all that she had to stay caught up with the others? No. Jesus observed that she was responding to something magnificent she herself had been given.

Let's go back to an account in Genesis that I refer to so often. The account of Cain and Abel. We remember Cain and Abel, both, brought their offerings to the Lord. The Lord favored Abel's but not Cain's. Why was that? Because, as we are told in the Book of Hebrews, that Abel gave his out of faith in the Lord. Cain became jealous over Abel's offering being favored, and we know how that ended it ended in Cain murdering Abel. Yet, again, Jesus is not comparing the rich and the poor in the Temple to Cain and Abel. We do not know what was in the hearts of the poor that Jesus observed because Jesus does not tell us. Who knows? Maybe they too were giving in response to what the Lord had given them. But, the Lord knew the widow's situation was a lesson the disciples had to learn.

And, that was the lesson of faith, true faith. Not just any faith, but the faith the Lord desires for all to have in Him in who He says He is to the world. Who He is plain and simple- He is the Lamb of God, the Lamb who was sacrificed. He is the Lamb who gave all that He had, from the heart, out of love for those He came to serve, us. Jesus did not become flesh, He did not walk the face of this earth, and dwell with us, simply to give only a portion of Himself or what He had. He freely, willingly, loving, handed over everything about Him, everything He was, and everything He had to His enemies. And, it was His enemies that He was giving it up for.

We all know how that happened. He allowed the insults to be hurled at Him. He allowed the false accusations about Him to be made. He allowed Himself to be charged, tried, and convicted of something He never did. All the while He knew how it would end, in an agonizing and horrible death. All the while He knew He was doing it for the eternal benefit of His own enemies.

It truly was an offering of staggering proportions on Jesus' part. All that He was, not part of who He was, is what He gave the world. At the time Jesus was sitting in the Temple with the disciples that day, this had not yet been completed and fulfilled. It was, for those who had true faith in the Promise of a Savior, something to come. It was that Promise, that eternal Promise from God, to send a Savior, that those in the Old Testament who had true faith had faith in. They looked forward to that fulfillment, they eagerly awaited that day they were sure they would be redeemed. And, because of that Promise, they were willing to give all that they had so others would know about it and be sure of it.

And, here we are today leaning upon the outcome of that day in history when our Lord was suspended from that wooden cross, that day when He made an offering of staggering proportions. Leaning, relying, on the outcome of that day, and looking forward to the day of His return when we will receive the full consummation of what He won for us that day.

Friends, it's important for us all to be reminded, that those who have true faith in Jesus' Promise concerning what He has done for us do not need to be commended. Do we need to hear from our Lord, "Great faith you have there. Keep it up"? No, we do not need that. Our focus is completely upon the sacrifice, the offering, Jesus made on our behalf. We realize He did not have to do what He did for us, but that He wanted to. We realize we do not, in any way at all, deserve what He did for us, but that He did so because He loves us.

The heart we have been given, friends, is a heart filled with trust, that what Jesus Promises is true. It is a heart filled with thankfulness for what He has done and what Promises He will continue to do. It is a heart that leaps at every opportunity to give all that we have to serve Him who first served us by bringing Him, the Lord of all, to those who so desperately need Him. Just like the gentlemen I mentioned in the beginning of the sermon.

What we have is life, life that only comes from our Lord. It is a life that only He could win for us and give us. It is not a life given to us to do what sinners like to do, but a life given to use what forgiven and thankful sinners like to use it for- that is, to bring the same message we are comforted by to others. So, we use everything we have, that is what we have been given to do so.

Judgment Day, the day our Lord will return will be filled so full of surprises for each of us who truly believe in Jesus Christ. Sure it will be surprising for those who have rejected Him, but for a different reason. For believers on that day, "Oh gracious Lord, I do not deserve the wonderful rewards you have given me. Thank you." Friends, we do nothing with the lives we have been given to gain credit for ourselves, but we do all with our lives to give glory to the One who gives us life.

Yes, as I mentioned, I failed time after time, to share with that gentlemen here in Springfield, the great news of Jesus' sacrifice of staggering proportions for him. That failure is exactly why the Lord gave Himself as the ultimate sacrifice. So, I could be forgiven, and He has forgiven me. Join with me, friends, in giving our Lord thanks for His willingness to forgive us every time we have failed to use the lives His given us for His purpose. And, may we joyfully, together, live our renewed lives for Him, giving all that we have so others may be sure of what He has done for the world. All the while resting assured that we have been given the very faith our Lord loves to observe in our hearts. Friends, it's amazing, what the Lord loves to see in our hearts is exactly what He has put in our hearts. Amen.