

38 As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39 and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! 40 They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43 Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

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7 The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaining. 10 Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. 11 Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

This is word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### ***“Gathered and Sent: Stewards of the Kingdom” Pt 3***

She gave her whole life! That’s what she gave, friends. She gave her whole life. The Greek is clear. The scholars are correct. She didn’t give a tithe, not a portion, not a percentage, but her whole life.<sup>1</sup> The widow in today’s gospel story gave everything she had.

Jesus witnessed her gift while sitting opposite the Temple treasury in Jerusalem, in the capital city, the place of his people’s historic aspirations and dreams, the heart of their religion. He’d been teaching in the Temple, during Passover, his final week on earth. He had just finished calling out the hypocrisy of the pretentious scribes who wore fancy robes, demanded the best seats, and showed off by praying loud, lengthy prayers. There he saw her, a poor widow, putting her offering into one of the collection boxes. The boxes were large, copper receptacles. When substantial offerings, all supervised by a priest, were made by the rich, a lot of noise occurred as the money fell. However, the widow’s donation of two copper coins, a pittance, made little sound. *“It was noticeably the amount that you and I might leave behind in the little dish by the cash register or that we wouldn’t bother to pick up from the sidewalk.”*<sup>2</sup> Her gift however, Jesus noted was more than anyone else gave because it was EVERYTHING that she had, EVERYTHING that she had.

If we look closely at this text, we will see Jesus was doing two things here: He was both condemning the religious leaders’ behavior, and he was commending the widow for hers. He was condemning the leaders for ignoring the ways that their excesses consumed the poor, the way they were forgetting God’s law to care for them, the weak and vulnerable, and, in fact, the way they’d become part of a system of injustices which worsened their lot. They, for instance, charged exorbitant fees for handling real estate when a man died, such that widows suffered greatly, many women succumbed to starvation following the deaths of their husbands. The collections, the Temple taxes, like that which the widow had contributed, were being used internally only, for Temple wine, for instance. The leaders, who knew the Law, should have

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<sup>1</sup> Karoline Lewis. *“Whole Life Living”*. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3717> (accessed 11/15/19).

<sup>2</sup> John Buchanan. *“True Religion”* <https://cathedral.org/sermons/rev-john-m-buchanan-true-religion/> (accessed 11/15/19).

remembered their responsibility to love God and neighbor, to turn their skills, and time and money into action on behalf of their neighbors.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus was condemning them here. But he also was commending the widow for her giving, for her giving out of a sense of hope. She believed in the goodness of the institution of God to provide for the poor, for other widows like herself, for her neighbors who were in great need.<sup>4</sup> She trusted that the Temple was not an isolated group of individuals but rather a community, a group of people gathered and bound together by mutual need and caring. She was, whether she knew it or not, enacting what the “Jesus Movement” was about, embodying how we imagine the kingdom of God ... a place of sacrificial love, of sharing fully and completely with and for each other.<sup>5</sup> *As Karoline Lewis says, “We cannot miss that the widow’s offering foreshadowed Jesus’ own act on the cross...She believed that what she did would manifest itself in something beyond herself. In the end, this is truly discipleship. This is truly salvific, and it is what Jesus portrayed. But more so, this is the essence of God. God knows nothing else than to give God’s whole life. God has shown this time and time again in the Hebrew Scriptures and here, now, in this unnamed widow, God has done it again.”*<sup>6</sup>

Yes, the widow offered her whole self. She gave it all, and that is what Jesus had been trying to teach his disciples, and it is what he was about to show all of humanity on the cross. This is, in fact, at the heart of the Gospel, this radically counterintuitive idea—that we claim our lives, fully live our lives only if we figure out a way to lose them, to give them away!

*I don’t know about you, but I always am aware when Christmas is coming if for no other reason than that our mailbox starts to become jammed with magazines...glossy, beautiful, thick ones of all varieties and types, from companies selling novelties, to candies, to fruits and meats and cheeses, to the usual clothing and books. They are all saying the same thing to me, “Buy this and you will be happy, and you will be alive.” It’s almost a religious kind of message,*

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<sup>3</sup> Chrissy Cataldo “All in: Mark 12:38-44”. <http://www.wccucc.org/sermon-blog/sermon-for-november-8-2015-all-in-mark-1238-44>. (accessed 11/15/19).

<sup>4</sup> Emerson Powery. *Commentary on Mark 12:38-44* [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2662](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2662) (accessed 11/15/19).

<sup>5</sup> Karoline Lewis.

<sup>6</sup> Karoline Lewis

*especially when combined with the barrage of TV ads, billboards, internet commercials and store displays that surround and say the same thing.* But, brothers and sisters, our religion is in following our Savior who lived by giving, by giving totally, by giving his life, by giving it all.

I love the quote by Annie Dillard in her book called, *The Writing Life*. She says, “*One of the few things I know about writing is this: Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book: give it: give it all: give it now...The impulse to save something for a better place later is the signal to spend it all. Something more will arise for later. These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes.*”<sup>7</sup>

Right. You open your safe and find ashes. The bottom line today, friends, is that we need read this passage – the whole passage – first as a cautionary tale about how easy it is to cave into our insecurity and cultural messages of scarcity and be seduced to “look out for number one,” not only in our individual lives but as an institution of the Church. We dare not slip into the trap that the religious leaders of Jesus’ time slipped into. We need go forward mindfully and watchfully, always checking ourselves through our polity against the Word of God. But we also need read this passage as an invitation to support this Church as it gives of its full self. We need remember and give thanks for the gift of community and fellowship we have been blessed with here. For we are not an isolated group of individuals but rather a group of people gathered and bound together by mutual need and caring. We are empowered with many abilities and assets to care not just in part but fully and deeply, incarnationally, sacrificially for each other and the world.<sup>8</sup>

Today, the day we’ve set a goal to turn in our pledges of time, and talent and treasure, we should remind ourselves that despite this church’s need to give attentions to our building and grounds, to staffing, to worship, to our internal programing for the discipleship of children, youth and adults, to member care and life within the church...which are all very

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<sup>7</sup> Annie Dillard. “*The Writing Life*.” (New York: Harper & Row; 1989), 78-79.

<sup>8</sup> David Lose. “*Rethinking Stewardship*”. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1628> (accessed 11/15/19).

significant....our outward focus on mission, both in our community and abroad, intentionally continues to increase and increase. Every year, the amount we are able to do and the energy we put into caring for our neighbor expands...and this outward looking is a sign of kingdom living. We are grateful that together by the Spirit's power, we are accomplishing good things.

Our August mission month gives us an opportunity to have "hands on" participation in projects such as making sandwiches for the homeless and, this year, we made blankets for the newborns in Zambia, bought what resulted in 6 cows which will change the life of a village in Africa, and supported the work of our Presbytery as it addresses the needs of those who have been hit by disaster. But aside from mission month, FPC supports the work of our mission co-workers in Zambia and a chaplain in Lebanon. We give generously to the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance whenever crises occur, but also we make hygiene kits during Lent for PDA's distribution as it responds to disasters. We support the 4 PCUSA offerings (OGHS, Pentecost, Peace & Global Witness and Joy), and have for over 30 years. We support the hungry and homeless via direct donations and counseling, and also by giving generously to the Cove Soup Kitchen, the Souper Bowl of Caring, and the Cove House. We support children/youth at PCHAS, Mo-Ranch Camps & Conferences, CC Low Income Schools, our Scout Troup, and the Rainbow Room of Coryell County. We also support other special groups such as Operation Stand Down Central Texas Organization and two local Animal Shelters.

Friends, the text today, reminds us of who we called to be, a community, bound by our true discipleship and call to live outwardly, to live sacrificially, caring for others with the deep, deep love of the living God. We are called to give out of a sense of Christian hope. We are called to give with total abandon to that which manifests itself bigger than ourselves. As FPC goes forward into another year, let us recognize there is an invitation here, to a radical extravagance, to live our lives with passion and love, all the way to the cross. "*Look,*" Jesus said. "*Look at her, she gave all she had.*" May the glory be His. Amen.