

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."

This is the word of the Lord.

FIRST READING: 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 pg 183 NT

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹ As it is written,
"He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever."

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

This is the word of the Lord.

“Your Heart-Your Treasure”

Today we continue our stewardship emphasis. I am reminded of the cartoon of *the little boy who was fidgeting in church during a similar time of year. Finally, he leaned over to his mother and asked, “Mom, if we just give the money now, do you think the pastor will let us go?”*¹ Wellllllll, no. Christian stewardship is not about squeezing a few more dollars out of sometimes reluctant church members. Nor is it about paying dues or even supporting the church budget, although that is important. The true meaning of stewardship is something else.

Let’s consider today one of the most well- known texts in the Gospels, the account of the poor widow who gave her last two cents to the Temple treasury. Her sacrifice was complete. She gave so much of herself that Jesus called his disciples over to see it. He compared her actions to what the Scribes were doing. He said, *“The poor widow has put in more than all of them, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”*

Now, while Jesus was not rejoicing that the widow’s generosity deprived her of her whole livelihood, he did lift her up. He lifted her up because she trusted God in the midst of the world comprised of broken people and systems.² She shared a real might, God’s might—a might known in love and loyalty, in giving and grace, in dependence and dedication.³ Yet, his real focus here is found in the context. There we get the fuller deeper meaning. Jesus didn't allow his listeners to forget about the poor, nor what the Kingdom, God’s way, looks like.⁴

Just PRIOR to the widow’s offering, Jesus said, *“beware the scribes”* who *“devour widows’ houses*. The scribes, you see, were scholars who studied the Law, meticulously transcribed it, and wrote commentaries on it. They also were those who could draft legal documents such as contracts for marriage, divorce, loans, mortgages, and the sale of land. However, somewhere along the way, they’d lost track of the Law’s intent. They’d forgotten that having compassion

¹ Arthur Sundstrom. Sermon: *Resources at the Ready*” In: William Carter, ed. *“Speaking of Stewardship.”* (Louisville: Geneva Press; 1998); 18.

² Amanda Brobst-Renard. *Commentary*. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/ordinary-32-2/commentary-on-mark-1238-44-6>. (accessed 11-11-23).

³Karoline Lewis. *The Widow’s Might*. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/the-widows-might>. (accessed 11-9-23).

⁴ Greg Carey. *“The Value of Chump Change”* https://day1.org/articles/5d9b820ef71918cdf2003353/on_scripturethe_bible_dr_greg_carey_the_value_of_chump_change_mark_123844 (accessed 11-11-23).

on the poor, on widows, orphans and aliens is foundational to God's commands. So, Jesus was pointing out the disparity between the Scribes' abundance and the widow's poverty, the Scribes' blind actions to prohibit the widow from remaining in her home, the meaning of the different sizes of their offerings, and certainly the difference between their motivations to give!!! The widow becomes for us, through Jesus' eyes, as much "a victim as a hero".⁵

In addition, just FOLLOWING the text, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple due to the faithlessness of God's people. He made the point that the kingdom is not where people with abundance expect the vulnerable and poor to bear burdens which trap them in destitution,⁶ where there is cruelty, lies, callousness and oppression, where the powers of evil rule the day. The Kingdom is where no matter what darkness surrounds them, believers respond by doing good, by showing kindness, beauty, compassion, tenderness, and grace and GENEROSITY, by preaching and teaching in a way that doesn't perpetuate inequity and where change is boldly called for where needed. They love because God first loved them.⁷

SOOOOOO....Looking at the context, the before and after, we see a much deeper meaning to the story and it is what we need to contemplate today. Here lies the meaning of stewardship. It is what we need to ask the Spirit to help us apply to our lives. What do you think? Where will you go with this? Well, I think I walk away with an understanding of why Mike and I give to the Church, why we will always give to the Church. In the Church we can be Kingdom bearers, we can boldly and freely care for others, especially the poor and the vulnerable, with our whole selves, our lives, our all.⁸ We can push back against an economy that siphons its resources upward and leaves the vulnerable on their own. We can here do the most good for God's children with what we've been given. (*LONG PAUSE*)

A couple of years ago, at about this time of year, Mike and I together visited a beloved matriarch of this church. She was in the hospital. She was one of few charter members of First Presbyterian Church still living in this area. In our conversation, not surprisingly, she asked

⁵ Greg Carey..

⁶ David Lose. In: Daily Bread. Luke 21:1-4. <http://www.davidlose.net/2013/12/luke-21-1-4/> (accessed 11-8-17 and 11-9-23).

⁷ David Lose.

⁸ Jill Duffield. "The Presbyterian Outlook" <http://pres-outlook.org/2017/11/why-i-give-to-the-church/> (accessed 11-9-23)

how the Church was doing? I said, “we were doing well, Mary. We’re doing fine”. After a while, with the conversation remaining on the Church, I asked her what she loved most about it. She said, without a bit of hesitation, not a bit, that she “loved the church because of the people, and how they care for each other”. I wasn’t surprised, for this IS the characteristic that over and over again is lifted as the most descriptive of our church.

Here, we do care for each other. I know you know that. The word family is actually a very good word for what we have here...brothers and sisters lifting each other up during hard times, laughing, crying together, celebrating each other’s successes, grieving together, helping to raise our children together, listening and learning from each other...CARING FOR EACH OTHER. But we also care for others. Together, WE try here to respond to God’s goodness by giving of ourselves to those who are in need....and to do so not reluctantly, but cheerfully.

Did you know that this year, as the last several, FPC is on track to give over 10% of its income directly to mission! And the Session continues to increase that goal. This, of course, does not include all the physical donations of food, clothing, toys, supplies, which are donated to agencies like the Soup kitchen, the PDA, Blessings Home Orphanage, the Rainbow Room, and PCHAS. All four offerings of the PCUSA are well supported here. And through these, FPC helps in providing relief to the victims of disasters, the poor, to the oppressed and weary. The needs of at-risk children and youth are addressed, and witness is shared in cultures of violence and persecution. At FPC, mission co-workers have been tangibly supported around the world as we support our local veterans’ groups. The elderly at Stoney Brook have been led in a worship service monthly now for 8 years, and people who come to our door with special needs are routinely assisted. Children are valued here, guided and nurtured, loved. And members are offered a listening ear and tangible help if needed through our church programs.

Kingdom work is done here...in an often threatening and dark world. The Light is let in and we let it shine! We affirm here with all that we do that the promise that is ours, that evil will not win. It is doomed. LOVE is in our midst.⁹ Life, grace and kindness is claimed.

⁹Lewie Donalson. Sermon: “Sermon”. Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Chapel service. Nov 7, 2017.

Jesus said that “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*”(Lk 12:34). Well, you know, I think there is corollary to that truth. It is “*Where your HEART is, your TREASURE need be also*”.¹⁰ The people of FPC-CC have a heart to help each other and to help others and their money, time and talent follow. I am certain that this is why Mike and I cannot help but give our first fruits to the church...no, not just a capital C Church, but to this specific church, to First Presbyterian Church of Copperas Cove. We love this place. This is where our heart is and this need be where our treasure is also.

And we want this church to continue for a long time to come. We want it to be here for all of our grandchildren and great grandchildren and great great grandchildren. We want it to be here for all those whom they care for. In essence, we want it to be here for everyone to know that God has first loved them and that they can respond to God’s goodness by loving others, especially those who are in need. This then is the meaning of stewardship.... “*He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.*” May it be so. Amen.

¹⁰ Jill Duffield.