

**GENEROSITY:
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO HAVE A GENEROUS HEART?
Pentecost 26 – November 14 & 18, 2018 (s752.doc)
765 – 611 (*Gloria*) – 487:1-5 – 488 – 487:6-8
Pastor Thomas Fricke**

Please take a moment to watch this...

[video – electronic giving tokens]

You may have seen this video before. It was created to let you know that electronic giving is a good option for your church offerings. But it also highlights something else. When the offering plate passes by, we sometimes worry about what other people see. The video provides a solution to the problem that if you give electronically, it may look as if you're not giving anything at all. When it comes to giving our church offerings, we're very self-conscious about what other people see.... That leads into our sermon text for today. **Listen to Mark, chapter 12:**

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." (Mark 12:41-44)

One of the first conferences I attended as a young pastor in Minnesota was about 65 miles away in West St. Paul. I drove, and as I got closer to my destination, the fuel light went on. **[fuel light]** It was on empty, but I was also on a tight schedule. I calculated how much farther I could go, and didn't stop to buy gas. I got there okay, but I remember telling myself, "Don't forget to fill up *before* you go home."

The conference began with a worship service, and I sat down next to Pastor Henrich, an older pastor who was a year or two away from retirement. There was an offering, and as the offering began, I opened my wallet and discovered that all I had was a \$20 bill—that's all. And I needed to buy gas on the way home. So to cover my embarrassment, I turned to Pastor Henrich, showed him my wallet, and said, "This is all I have." Then he did something I didn't expect. He reached into his wallet, pulled out one dollar and gave it to me to put into the plate. He has since passed away, but I often think about Pastor Henrich and the day he treated me as if I were his own son. **[Blank screen.]**

Pastor Henrich saved me from a little embarrassment that day...but I learned something more—something about giving. You see, the value of giving goes beyond the gift that is given, whether it's one dollar or 20 or more. Its real value is that it expresses ***what's in the heart***...something that can't be seen.

Today we learn that same lesson in the story of the poor widow. She gave to the Lord a small amount—two copper coins—but she gave out of a tremendously generous heart. I'd like us to think about that today:

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO HAVE A GENEROUS HEART?

Let's take a look.

Mark says, "*Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury*" (Mark 12:41). Jesus is at the temple. He's watching people as they give their offerings on their way in. And he's interested not so much in ***the gifts*** the people are giving—***the amount***. He is far more interested in ***the motive—the reason*** people have for giving.

So all these people are coming to the temple for the Passover—some of them important people who have come from quite a distance—and many of them have large amounts of money. This is Tuesday of Holy Week—the last week of Jesus' life. He's just had a confrontation with the teachers of the law. He criticized them.

He told the crowds, *“Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the market places, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely”* (Mark 12:38-40). On the outside they looked good, but they *“devoured widows’ houses.”* They had no compassion for people in need.

I can point fingers at them, but I have to wonder...***what if I had been there at the temple that day?*** What would Jesus have seen? I come to church and put my offering into the receptacle...and Jesus is watching. Would he see ***stinginess*** in a meager offering? Or would he detect an attitude of ***pride*** in the amount I give?

The receptacles for offerings are made of metal and there’s no paper currency. All people have is coins, and they make noise. Lots of noise. So the rich come by and the crowd notices. They hear all the coins going in.

And then there’s a poor widow who walks by. **[image of woman]** She drops in her two pennies...and it’s quiet. Nobody notices. Nobody cares. Nobody, that is...except Jesus. ***He sees something nobody else does.***

So he calls his disciples together and tells them: *“I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on”* (Mark 12:43,44). Jesus wants his disciples to understand what’s just taken place. They could easily have gotten the impression that the rich and famous are the ones to imitate. But no. It’s ***this woman*** who has ***the most generous heart***. Jesus wants them to see things his way, and in his eyes, it’s not the ***amount*** of the gift that counts, but the ***quality***. Its real value is about ***what’s in the heart***.

What does it take to have a generous heart? It takes ***love***—love for the God who made you. This woman loved her Lord. But more than that, she loved what he had done for her soul. She knew her need; she recognized her sin. But she knew that God had promised to send a Savior who would come and set his people free. So she wanted to show her thanks and support the work of sharing with others the Good News that brought her peace! And nothing—not even her poverty—was going to keep her from saying, ***“Thank you!”***

That’s the first thing it takes to have a generous heart—***love***. Love ***for God*** and ***for the people he came to save***.

But there is another quality this woman had. She ***trusted*** that the God who made her and who planned for her salvation would also provide for her daily needs...even in her extreme poverty. ***What does it take to have a generous heart?*** It takes ***love***...and it takes ***trust—trust that the Lord will provide***.

I saw an example of that kind of trust first-hand this past week. I traveled to Hong Kong to represent our synod’s Commission on Inter-Church Relations at a conference of ***the CELC—the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference***—an organization of church groups across the world that believe and teach as we do in the Wisconsin Synod. This was a regional conference with our sister churches from the continent of Asia in attendance—from Korea, Japan, and China, to Taiwan, Indonesia and India.

While I was there, we heard some disheartening news: one of our missionaries in India is being denied re-entry into the country. This has the potential to have a huge impact on our work in that field.

Our last day there, I had the chance to speak briefly with one of Indian pastors, a man named Ashok. I said, “I suppose this changes everything for you.” But Ashok didn’t respond as I expected. He smiled. And he said, ***“God is our refuge and strength...therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea...”*** (Psalm 46:1,2). His quiet confidence said it all. “We have nothing to fear. We will continue to trust in the Lord and the power of his Word.”

That's trust—the confidence that God will take care of us, no matter what. And that—coupled with love—will help us to have a generous heart...for the Lord and his work.

The woman who gave her last two pennies **for God** had a powerful trust that the Lord would provide. She gave everything—all she had to live on. It reminds us that in just two days, Jesus himself would go to the cross. **[image of cross]** And there **he** would give everything **for us**.

- “*Though he was rich, yet for [our] sakes he became poor, so that [we] through his poverty might become rich*” (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- He humbled himself so that we might be exalted.
- He “made himself poor” so that we might have it all!

He's given us work to do...to share the gospel here at home and throughout the world. And that Word is bearing fruit...not only in our Sunday School, our Lutheran elementary school, and our Bible Information Classes, but also in the deepening and widening fellowship we share with Christians throughout the world...

What we need to realize is that everything we have comes from the Lord. Like Pastor Henrich...God simply puts it into our hands...and we just pass it on to carry out his work.

What does it take to have a generous heart? Two things: it takes **love** and **trust—love for our Lord** and **the people he came to save**, and **trust in his promise to provide**.

When we know that he's given his all for us, **[image of cross]** then it's easy for us to give our all for him!
AMEN.