

dent in global poverty and the AIDS crisis in Africa. But when my gift is added to the Baptist World Alliance effort on global poverty, I am making a difference. I personally can't influence many of the children at Fairview Junior High School, but when my gift goes towards the 1st P.L.A.C.E Tutoring program, I am personally touching these young lives. I might never be able to go to Bolivia to work with Charles and Hannah McCall and the native Indians, but through my gift to the missions' fund, I am participating in that mission.

But the woman gave all that she had to live on! Why? I suspect that it was more than any of these. I suspect that she gave out of love. A deep love for God; and for God's word that had nurtured her all of her life and had become even more meaningful in these later years; and for God's house, the temple, and if one mite would help repair the roof, she was willing; and for God's people, the nation of Israel, her people, the community that supported her, God's earthly hands, the saints who had taught her; and for God's rituals that gave structure to her spiritual life and provided her with ways to express her faith; and for God's Spirit that was a very present help in times of trouble, and times of grief, and times of doubt, and times of loneliness, and times when human hands were not available for her. Maybe it was a love for all of these that motivated her to give. Yes, I think it was love because that would be something that

Jesus would notice.

So, why do we give? If you feel manipulated, please don't give. I think Jesus will understand. But if at some level, you can give because there is a deep love, then you will have found the right motivation and this year's missions offering will be a good experience for you.

The widow moved slowly toward the treasury. She held her mite firmly in her hand, not wanting to drop it, not wanting to lose it, certainly not wanting to be noticed.

Just ahead of her was a merchant, who dropped his offering in the treasury and praised God out loud.

She moved quickly after him, dropped her small coin in the treasury, wrapped her shawl around her shoulders, and quietly exited the building.

And Jesus noticed. Today, so have we. Thanks be to God.

¹ Andre Resner, Jr. The Living Pulpit, April-June, 2003, p. 6.

² Cf. footnote, The New Oxford Annotated Bible, NRSV, Mark 12:41, p. 67 NT.



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

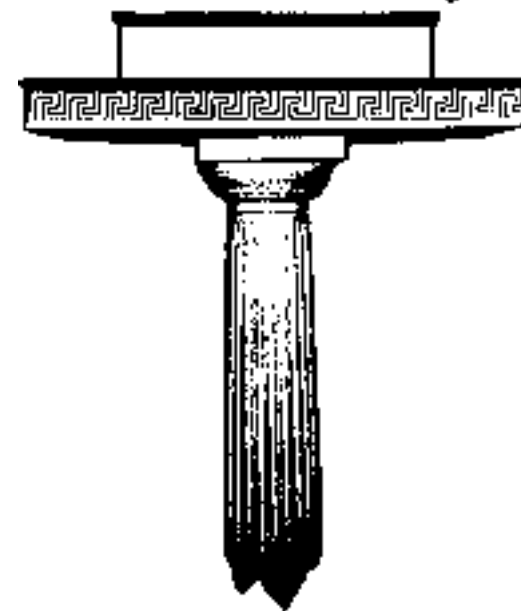
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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

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The Pulpit Ministry



November 12, 2006

Twenty-third Sunday of Kingdomtide

A Widow's

Witness

Mark 12:38-44

Rev. Dr. Kenneth A. Corr, Pastor
200 E. Parkway N.
Memphis, Tennessee 38112

Around the world and across the street. Today we are beginning our annual emphasis on missions and I want to spend some time this morning learning from this widow. One preacher has called her, “The patron saint of Stewardship Sunday, the exemplar of sacrificial giving.”¹

Last Sunday, we learned that there are some saints that we ought to imitate, some saints from whom we can learn, some saints who demonstrate by their lives what is expected, like Henry Martin and this widow with the coins.

Why does she give all that she has to live on? What motivates her generous response? Jesus prefaces this story of the widow’s gift with the warning, “Beware of the scribes who . . . devour widows’ houses.” I am very aware that scribes, Pharisees, and Baptist preachers have been known to manipulate and exploit people for their money. Our missions emphasis has a monetary goal. You will be invited to give. There is an offering envelope in the worship guide. But hear the warning. I don’t want you to feel manipulated. Instead, this morning, I want you to think about why you will give or not give.

Why did the widow give all that she had to live on? Of course, we can’t know her motivations. We can only imagine. But as we imagine, my invitation is for you to think about your own motivations. Look again at this story.

Jesus had spent the day in the temple teaching. It had been a long day filled with

challenges and controversy. As the day came to an end, he sat opposite the treasury. The treasury consisted of thirteen chests, stationed throughout the outer court of the temple court, each labeled for different causes.² One might say, “Benevolent Needs.” One might say, “Temple Repair and Maintenance.” One might say, “Annual Festival Fund.” One might say, “Sanctuary Choir Fund.” We don’t know which one of these stations she came to. Let’s just say it was the “Annual Missions Fund.” But it was the end of the day and she was in line with the others.

Mark says that there was a “crowd.” It was probably the time of day when the merchants came, after the shops had closed, to give their tithe and offer their prayers before going home. If it had been a good business day, the money in the treasury would ring as they dropped in their coins.

In the midst of this crowd, this widow came. My guess is that she was trying hard not to be seen, not to be noticed, not to draw any attention. After all, her offering would be small in comparison to the merchants. Her small offering would be an embarrassment in comparison to the others. As quietly as possible, as unobtrusively as possible, as invisibly as possible, she dropped her small coin into the treasury, wrapped her shawl around herself, and exited the building. No one noticed, no one cared, except Jesus. She did not want to be noticed, but he noticed

and he cared because she had given all that she had to live on.

Why did she do that? Why would she do that?

Maybe she gave out of habit. If you have been raised in the church, you learned as a child that you were expected to give and it has become the habit of your life. If she had the habit of giving, it was not something that she even had to think about. For good or bad, it was just what she did.

Maybe she gave out of guilt. This may be what Jesus was condemning with the scribes who devoured widows’ houses. They knew how to manipulate and exploit people’s guilt. You have felt the preacher’s gaze penetrating into the depths of your pocket book and you have written a check simply out of guilt. We’ve all been there.

Maybe she gave out of a sense of obedience. She had heard all of her life that giving is part of faithful living and she wanted to be obedient. She knew that though it was a struggle now, one day she would hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in the small things, now you will be given the larger things.” Giving is an act of obedience. Giving is a discipline. Giving is a part of faithful discipleship.

Maybe she gave out of a sense of mission, something that was larger than her meager gift. Through her gift, she was a part of touching many lives.

My personal finances can’t make a