

4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN LENT  
MARCH 5/6, 2016

1<sup>ST</sup> LUTHERAN, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

I KINGS 17:8-16; MARK 12:38-44

*Faith, Hope and Love*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*



Two **drops** of water...in **all** the oceans of the world,  
Two **grains** of sand...from every **beach** and **desert** combined,  
Two **points** of light...in a **heaven** filled with *billions* of stars...

Two copper coins,  
Two paltry pennies,  
Two insignificant cents...

**What** can they buy? What purchasing power do they possess?  
What appreciable **impact** could they possibly have on **any**  
**fund-raising**, **money-making**, **income-inspiring** efforts:

to **feed** the hungry, or **clothe** the naked, or **bring** good news to those who are the **last**, the **lost** and the **least** among us?

**What difference** would those two copper coins have made to the Temple in **Jerusalem**, to the Vatican in **Rome**, or...to Higgins Road in **Chicago**? I know, I know, that **last** example is a little **obscure**: it's the address for the headquarters of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

**All** these questions so far have been *rhetorical* – I **haven't expected** an answer...but let's wrestle with that last question for a minute. **What difference WOULD two cents make to anyone's life anywhere in the world?** -not much...not for long

...and **yet**, this woman's *diminutive donation*, her *undersized offering*, her seemingly insignificant gift  
 -catches the eye of the Lord of Life,  
 -inspires praise by the Prince of Peace,  
 -causes Jesus Christ himself to pay her a compliment...for her *miniscule*, yet *magnificent gift!!*

Faith, hope and love...

In many ways this beautiful and heart-wrenching story that ends today's Gospel lesson provides a stark contrast to that which comes before it.



Jesus spends these last days of his life, teaching in the temple. Surprise, surprise, huh? Remember that in Luke's Gospel we hear the only story of Jesus as a tween-or-teenager. Back when he was twelve years old, his family travels to Jerusalem for the Passover – exactly as he has done now. When the festival ends, the families who travelled together there, now travel together toward home. **What do his parents soon discover?**

Jesus got *left behind...!*

After three days of frantic searching through the city, they finally find the boy in the temple, talking with the scribes. Mary says to her son, *Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety!*

**And what's his response?**

*Did you not know that I must be (either) in my Father's house or about my Father's business?*

How beautifully ironic – here Jesus is again, in his Father’s house, about his Father’s business, where he meets another scribe, a rare scribe, one with integrity, who praises Jesus for connecting the two great precepts of the Law:

-love God with heart, soul, mind and strength, AND  
-love your neighbor as yourself. Very cool, huh?

**-love God and love your neighbor as yourself**, says the scribe, and Jesus replies, *You’re not far from the kingdom of God...*

But he proves to be the exception to the rule, for Jesus goes on to say, *Beware of the scribes...(who) take advantage of widows and love to be praised for their long robes and flowery prayers...*



And then we’re introduced to the woman with those *two copper coins*. There is some *sad* irony at work in the story about this widow with her woeful little gift, an amount acutely **insignificant** to almost anyone else anywhere in the world. Yet she places *her coins* in the offering plate to

aid the work of the Lord. **So what is it about her action that prompts Jesus to praise her?**

Yeah - she offers her life's savings, *all she had to live on*, says Jesus, while standing in the courtyard of the very Temple whose priests and scribes have been charged to care for people like her!!

By giving **everything** she has: she literally places her **life**, her **well-being**, her *trust* into the hands of our God who **promises** to provide. In a world that is awash in shades of gray, here we have a stark study in **contrasts**, an example of **absolute opposites**, two groups of people who **occupy opposing ends** of the spectrum...those who have very little, and those who are willing to take it from them.

Studies show that as a rule, people who have less money are proportionately much more generous to charities and people in need than those who are wealthy. **Why do you suppose that is?**

In the end, it doesn't really matter, does it? As this story proves, Jesus does not care about the size of the gift – he cares about the spirit in which it was given.

Our granddaughter, Sophie, is 3½ years old – some of you met her last week when we had she and her brother Charlie here at worship – all of you, I'm sure, **heard** them. Anyway, on Sunday mornings, Sophie goes to worship with her dad, Tim, while Charlie goes with Rachel.



Sophie always sits with one of two retired couples who love her like their own. During the offering one day, she noticed that people were taking what they had and placing it in the plate, so she dug out one of her precious cheerios and made that her offering to the work of the Lord.

One little cheerio, two copper coins...cute, but insignificant. And yet, here's the magic of the Gospel at work...

This poor woman's gift – the very **last** thing on this entire **planet** that would be praised by those with worldly power, catches the eye of the Lord of Life, the Prince of Peace, the Son of God, our savior Jesus Christ.

Where the scribes were hoping that **their** gifts would be **regarded**, this woman's gift, she knew, would never be noticed – in fact, would most likely be ignored.

What this story tells us, though, is that indeed God does notice:  
-who we are, and...

-what we do, and  
-how we live, and  
-how we show that we love God and love our neighbors. And I don't mean that in a negative way.

God is **not** like that old Santa song:

He's making a list, he's checking it twice,  
he's gonna find out who's naughty and nice –  
Jesus Christ is comin' to town!

No, I mean it in the way that is good news to those widows on shoe-string budgets, to those who have next to nothing to live on, to those who are the last, the lost, the least and the lowly. *Does God know if you and I are giving sacrificially or just out of our abundance?* Well, Jesus knew with those he saw – so I'm thinking that God knows even that about you and me...

But we're not the point of this story – and the same is true about the widow in the Old Testament text. These stories are not about guilt, but about *faith, hope and love*...



The *widow of Zaraphath*, she has only enough food for one last meal before she and her son will **die** from starvation...yet she feeds the prophet Isaiah first.

Similarly, the widow in the Gospel story gives everything she has to serve God and the needs of the poor. In their willingness to offer all that they have to God...they are *Christ*-figures, no? They are like **Jesus**, filled with trust that God will provide.

Don't get me wrong – this is not some pie-in-the-sky piety that denies the reality of life's challenges. No, both women demonstrate what it truly means to give sacrificially.

Years ago, a reporter wrote about a deeply moving scene he witnessed in war-ravaged East Africa. He writes:



*We were in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, during the famine. It was so bad there that when we walked into one village, everyone in it*

*was dead. We saw one boy on the road – you could tell he had worms and was malnourished; his stomach was protruding.*

*When a child like that is starving, their hair turns a reddish color, and their skin becomes crinkled as though he's a hundred years old.*

*Our photographer had a grapefruit, which he gave to the boy. Yet the youth was so weak he couldn't even hold that single piece of fruit, so we cut it in half. The boy picked up the pieces, looked at us as if to say thanks, and began to walk back towards his village.*

*We walked behind him so that he couldn't see us. When he entered the village, there on the ground was a little boy who looked like he was dead. He didn't move and his eyes were completely glazed over.*

*Yet it turned out to be the youth's younger brother. The boy knelt down next to the child, bit off a piece of the grapefruit, and chewed it. Then he opened up his brother's mouth, put the grapefruit in, and worked his brother's jaw up and down. We learned that the boy had been keeping his younger brother alive like that for two weeks.*

*A few days later, we learned that the older brother died of malnutrition, but the younger brother survived.*

<http://www.christthehealer.us/article-TheGiftOfTrueLove-090118.html>

***Faith, hope and love.***



The widow of Zarephath gave the first of her last meal to the stranger claiming to be a prophet.

The widow at the temple quietly placed her entire life's savings into the treasury.

The Somali boy gave his life that his younger brother might live.

A loaf of bread...a couple of coins...a few pieces of half-chewed fruit...

No such gift will ever make a difference in the life of a country, a state or city...but few other gifts carry with them such an abiding treasure of grace.

Like our Lord's journey to the cross, these few made the **ultimate** sacrifice, giving **all** they had for what they believed in. A loaf of bread became an act of faith. Two copper coins, a demonstration of hope. A few bites of fruit, a precious gift of love.

While countless others of us will give much greater and more abundant gifts, precious few will ever be more highly regarded by our God in heaven.

Let us pray: *Faith, hope and love, Lord God...give us these gifts in abundance. Amen.*