



C. Kutz-Marks

**In God We Trust?<sup>i</sup>**  
Easter 3, a, April 13, 2008  
Stewardship Campaign Sermon  
Mark 12:38-44

Jesus is sitting in the Temple. Now Jesus had a favorite place to sit. It was a pew with a very special view.

How about you? Some of you seem to always sit in the same pew. Do you know why do you sit where you sit? Well, on the day pictured by our scripture in Mark, Jesus sat in the section called the Court of the Women, which was the section where the Treasury was. And Jesus was there for the view it afforded, a view of people and of their levels of commitment to God's work.

Imagine this: In this part of the Temple called the Treasury, there were 13 bronze receptacles shaped like trumpets, one after the other lining the walls. When the worshippers come in, they walk along the walls and put coins in different trumpets, one trumpet for each ministry of the Temple. In those days people didn't use paper money, and they couldn't write checks, there money was hard, durable metal. So as the metal of the coins bounced off the metal of the brazen trumpets, even with your eyes closed you could hear the size of the offering. And with eyes open you could learn alot about the giver. There Jesus sat, watching as the people came in to make their offerings. Jesus watched & Jesus thought.

You can imagine it well, perhaps, if you think of our own sanctuary with 13 trumpet holders, each for a different ministry that we have here:

- one for the upkeep & cleaning of the building,
- one for our Micah 6 offerings and other local service,
- one for support of the denominational Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- another for victims of natural disasters, and injustices nearby and in other states and countries,
- one for church school curriculum and training local church leaders,
- one for supporting the organist- the ministers - the secretary,
- another for office materials and books for counseling,
- one for supporting DSF and Youth on mission trips...

you may name the others! When we entered the sanctuary, we would put our money into the trumpets of our choosing - that would be our offering.

Well, some of you might be thinking, "Oh, no. We're going to be hearing about money in the church. I wish we wouldn't talk about money in the church." Well, I do know that some members of every church do not like to talk about money. It makes some uncomfortable.

But, Jesus is not one of those people!!!! If you open to the gospels in your Bibles and read, and then count what the verses refer to, you will find that one out of every three things that Jesus talked about had to do with our stewardship, that is, what we do with what we have. Another way to say it, because we believe that everything is God's – on loan to us, stewardship is what we do with what belongs to God.

Jesus talked about our spending of money and our giving of money being an accurate measure of where we are spiritually. Jesus said, "Where

your treasure is there will your heart be also." Or, where we put our money is where we are committed.

And so this day in the Temple, Jesus sat where he could see the people putting in their money. Jesus noticed, scripture says, that "many rich people threw in large amounts." Jesus noticed this. Jesus noticed the big givers. Isn't that interesting? Jesus saw the big bucks clanging down the metal trumpets and Jesus knew who gave them. Jesus watched as the chests filled up. Jesus watched. Jesus thought.

Then there was a poor woman who entered the temple: by her clothing all can tell she is a widow. Now remember that in Jesus' day, widowhood was even harder than today. There was no social security, no likelihood of work, and there were few legal rights for women. A lone widow, especially if she were too proud to beg for help, would often literally starve to death.

So, after Jesus watched the rich people go by each trumpet and throw in a lot of money into each one, then Jesus saw this poor widow come in. Driven by a sense of deep commitment, some deep duty, or some thankfulness to God, she risked the certain stigma of publicly giving an amount so little. And Jesus watched as she moved to the trumpet.

I imagine Jesus saw her shuffle in. And Jesus knew people. Jesus could see what was coming, and I can see him calling his disciples close, saying, "Don't miss this one! Watch, listen!"

And two small coins, tinkled down into one trumpet-- and after the jangling of the rich peoples' multitude of big coins, the sound of those two tiniest of coins must have seemed so faint.

And Jesus exclaimed to the disciples, look at her. "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury, than all the others."

But not being prone to catching deep truths quickly, we might imagine the disciples' response to Jesus. "No! What are you talking about, Jesus? You were right there in your favorite pew with a view, staring. Didn't you see how long the others took to walk around to all 13 of the Temple chests? Didn't you hear all of their money clanging in the bottom of the trumpet? Surely, you saw this poor widow. She only dropped in a couple of coins and left. Do you need glasses? Is the lighting in here bad?"

Jesus responded: "They all gave of their wealth, but she, of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on." What a strong faith this woman has!

\*

What we give in the offering, what we promise or pledge to give to God's work through the church, we may try to fool ourselves and think that no one knows how much we give - except the Treasurer of the church.

But Jesus knows. We can fool our friends and neighbors and even family, by saying what a hard time we are having making ends meet or balancing our budget at home, or that we are saving for our childrens' college or our retirement, but Jesus knows...our incomes, our payments, our bills, our savings. Christ knows how many we must feed and clothe in our family, our hospital and doctor costs, the price of gas and trips and taxes, what we spend on entertainment or travel, or simply save and save for some rainy day. Jesus knows - better than we do - the difference between our legitimate needs and our insatiable wants. And Jesus watches and thinks.

Just as in the Temple of old, Jesus watches how much each one of us puts in the offering. Imagine if the money you have in your life was divided into ten equal parts. We are directed in the Hebrew Scriptures to give one of those ten parts back to God - the first part. That is the definition of a tithe,

1/10<sup>th</sup> of our income. The tithe, the Hebrew Scriptures teach, is our offering back to God, before we spend any money on bread or phone, rent, insurance or anything.

Once a poor man had come to his pastor to ask for prayers concerning his financial condition. Though poor he had managed to remain faithful to this commitment to tithe, to offer to God his first 10%. They prayed together.

Over time this man's wealth increased, and increased dramatically.

Some years later he returned to the pastor with another problem.

"Pastor, I know that this is going to sound crazy, but now that I have so much more money," he confessed, "I find it impossible to make my 10% commitment anymore."

"That is a serious problem", the pastor agreed. "Let's bow our heads together in prayer again."

"Pray for what?" the man asked.

"Let's pray that God will take away your wealth, so that you may maintain your tithing!"

But I hope you get the spiritual principle here, the spiritual prioritizing. It isn't just some legalism. I know that many Christians are far from giving a tithe of their income which has long been that standard point at which significant giving is marked. More important than immediately reaching that bench mark, is to be growing in giving, making substantial steps forward to bespeak one's growing in TRUST AND IN FAITHFULNESS TO GOD.

For, as Jesus watches, he sees not only the gift, but also the attitude in which our offering is made. For the spirit in which we give shows the

condition of our hearts. And Jesus cares about our hearts. That's why in Second Corinthians, Chapter 9, we read

“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

And the Greek word here for "cheerful" is hilarios from which we get the word, "hilarious". Give hilariously. Give with the wild and free abandon of faith that characterizes those always safe, completely always safe in the love of God. That is the spirit of generosity and commitment Jesus is aching to see.

Some years ago a pastor wrote of an important encounter he had:

I remember a woman I spent 30 minutes with seven years ago. I was serving an inner city church, and a woman walked in with two young children just as the service was ending. One of the members came up to me a few minutes later and told me that this woman wanted to talk to the pastor and pay her tithe. The woman and I sat down in the front pew to talk, and my daughter and her two young sons played together under the piano as we talked.

"The woman had walked over to church from the battered women's shelter, and was quite distressed to find that she had missed the worship service. She was going to be getting on a bus the following morning and heading to a new life in a city 1,000 miles away. The shelter had made arrangements for her to stay in a shelter in the new city while she searched for a job and housing and got herself on her feet. She had come to the church because she wanted to pay her tithe and have the pastor pray for her before she set out to build a new life for her sons.

"She talked about how difficult it would be, moving to this new city, and how she was going to have to trust God if she was going to make it. She had no church home, and knew that was something she was going to have to change when she reached this new city. It was the first of the month, and she had just received her welfare check. She very carefully counted out exactly 10% of it and handed it to me. I wanted to refuse her money. As much as the church struggled financially, she and her two young sons needed it more. I opened my mouth to tell her to keep her money, but something stopped me. I realized that the money (about \$33) would not make the difference between her making it in the new town and not making it, but that her giving it, and thus putting God first and living out her trust in God, might very well make the difference. So, I took the money. I delivered it to the counters in the office, and found her a Bible. I wrote down some passages she might find helpful in the front of the Bible. I had a prayer with her. I sent her out the door and on her way to a new life.

"I have no idea what became of that woman, and don't even remember her name. I do remember her determination that if she was going to make a success of her new life, she had to put God first and live out her trust in God. I suspect she and the widow had a whole lot in common."

Today Jesus' favorite pew is the place right next to you and me as we write out our offering checks or in a couple of weeks fill our pledge cards for the coming year, and Jesus is watching you and me, watching and thinking. I wonder what Jesus is thinking?

<sup>i</sup> Reliant on my sermon *In God We Trust?*, Pentecost 21, b, Nov. 12, 2000 Mark 12:38-44 delivered at the Christian Church in Kalamazoo, MI. I expect that the Temple scene description, the pastor's prayer story, and certainly the pastor's story of the woman at the end, were drawn from a particular other source. Unfortunately I didn't adequate note that on the paper original in my filing system, and the computer file is lost in a hard drive disaster so I cannot provide proper credit to the original author of those.