

Mark 12:38-44
Pentecost 25B (Proper 27B)
November 11, 2018

“Giving Our All”

Grace be with all of you. (Hebrews 13:25)

“Giving our all ...” This is a tried and true characteristic of many people we admire in the world. We admire athletes who “give their all” for their teams ... playing with injury, collapsing from exhaustion. We admire business leaders, public servants, and others who seem to “give their all” to become successful in their chosen fields of endeavor. We admire those who served in the military, first responders, like law enforcement Sgt. Ron Helus in California, and others, who “give their all” to sacrifice for their fellow man. These people can be great role models for us as we struggle in our day-to-day existence. But, seeing how they persevered in their challenges, our strength can be renewed for ours ... we are able to carry on.

As Jesus watched people putting money into the Temple Offering Box, He pointed out a poor widow and told them, (Mark 12:43-44) *“Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”* This poor widow ... “she gave her all.”

You may not have heard of the late Pastor Gordon Cosby or the church he started in 1947 when he returned from WWII, the Church of the Savior in Washington DC. I hadn't heard of him until I read this story about his encounter with one of his church's people.

There was a widow with 6 children who lived on a fixed income. It was barely enough to feed, clothe, and provide for her family. Yet each week she faithfully placed \$4 in the offering plate. One of the church leaders suggested that Pastor Cosby tell her that she didn't need to give so extravagantly ... that it might be better for her to keep that money to provide for her family.

He did ... and it's a talk he regretted. When he told her that it was okay to keep the offering for her own use, she responded, "*You are trying to take away the last thing that gives me dignity and meaning.*" The woman, was privileged by God. To her, this privilege was an opportunity to do more for others in need. It was a privilege for her to give back to God as a way of thanking Him for His gracious provision to her and her family. She found much benefit in worshipping God by giving back to Him for all she had received from Him. This woman is a modern-day version of the woman we read about in God's Word ... "she gave her all."

At first glance, Pastor Gordon, by his own admission, saw the woman's \$4 as an insignificant amount ... something the church could do without. In the gospel this morning, the poor widow's offering ... two copper coins, the lowest denomination possible ... seems to be an insignificant amount. Meanwhile, others gave very significant amounts. They might even have been "tithers" ... "ten percenters" ... giving back to God a portion of what He'd given to them. But Jesus doesn't praise them ... He singles out the poor woman for praise.

Why is that? To many of us, accustomed to measuring by the world's standards, her little amount really doesn't seem to do much good to anyone. It might even have been a greater benefit if she just kept it herself. Meanwhile, the large amounts given by the others could achieve much more. But, God measures things differently than many of us do ... to Him, this woman, dropping her last two thin copper coins into the coffers ... she "had given her all."

You see ... God isn't looking at the amounts any of us give. He is looking into the hearts of the givers. He's looking to see what our hearts are filled with. He is looking to see whether or not, as we give back to Him, do we truly view God as He desires us to view Him.

The "tithes" of our treasure is one way we show how much we truly heed God's First Commandment ... "*Thou shall have no other gods.*" In heeding His Word, Martin Luther

explains, “*We fear, love, and trust in God above all things.*” Are we “giving our all” to God? When we do, *we recognize* that God loves us more than we can imagine. *We recognize* that God gives us all things – time, talent, and treasure ... and even our lives – to use to serve Him and those He places in our midst ahead of ourselves. *We recognize* that He will continue to supply our needs no matter how much of what He’s given to us already we use to serve Him and others. When we truly and fully “fear, love, and trust” God ... we live knowing He’ll care for us. The poor woman ... she “gives her all” because she knows God will care for her needs. And, Pastor Cosby’s parishioner ... she “gives her all” because she too knows God will care for her needs. “Giving their all” to God first ... it’s a sign of their faith in God for all He has done for them. When we live, knowing that God will care for all of our needs ... then we too “give our all.”

Jesus tells us that the seemingly extravagant givers, though they “gave a lot,” gave of their excess ... after they’d taken care of their own needs. Then, they “gave some” of their leftovers to God thinking they’d secured their own futures in what they’d kept for themselves. In essence, they see their money as theirs to be used as they see fit. On the other hand, the poor woman “gave her all” ... she had nothing left. She trusted God to continually provide for her needs. She saw her money, what little she had, as God’s ... loaned to her to do His will ... not her own will.

Put yourself into the story for a second ... which are we closer to? Are we closer to the “rich people putting in large sums” of their excess ... or ... to the poor woman who “gives her all?” Do we truly “fear, love, and trust” God to provide for our needs, even after we “give our all?”

I think most of us know, intellectually, that God will care for us. But actually living like He does is hard. We are constantly distracted by the world to make sure we “give our all” to ourselves before we “give anything” to Him and others.

Our time – the minutes, hours, and days God provides us ... we likely use a lot of it on ourselves and things of the world ... our obsessions over sports, entertainment, and hobbies, TV and Internet, “cat videos” and “political memes” on Facebook, Instagram, and other social media that suck us in and keep us from giving time to God and those He has placed in our lives.

Our talents – that knowledge, skill, and abilities God gives us to use in the life He’s given to us ... how and where do we use our physical strength, ability to speak to others, organization and leadership skills, artistic talents, ingenuity, and our smiles and presence? Are we so worn out at the end of a week that we don’t feel like using them in service to God and His people?

Our treasure – the money and material God has blessed us with to make things happen in His creation ... how much do we spend on fast food and gourmet coffee, the latest clothes or gadgets, toys, entertainment and pleasures? How much leftovers are there to drop in the plate to support God’s work in His creation?

Many of us find ourselves in privileged positions because of what God has given to us. Thus privileged, by God’s gifts of time, talent and treasure ... do we find it a privilege to give back our first fruits to Him in faith, knowing He’ll continue to provide? Or, after we’ve spent our time, talent, and treasure on ourselves ... heeding the world’s urgings and priorities ... do we give Him our leftovers? Or ... have we “given our all” to ourselves and the world ... leaving us without any leftovers to give?

God has “given His all.” First, He gives us our very lives. Then, He gives us whatever we need to live this life. Finally, He has given us the most precious gift of all ... life with Him. Jesus “gave His all” to make sure we receive the gift of eternal life. He forfeited His eternal time, talent, and treasure ... rightfully His as the Son of God ... to live as a servant here on earth.

If that wasn't enough, "He gave all" to do His Father's will. On the night of His betrayal Jesus turned to His Father in prayer saying, (Luke 22:42-43) "*Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.*" And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him." Jesus trusted His Father to help Him "give His all" ... and His Father provided ... giving Jesus the strength to endure torture, humiliation, and death for each of us. When Jesus rose from the dead, He defeated the power of sin and death to do "it's all" to us.

Because of Jesus, *we are freed* to "give our all" with the *time* our Father gives us to live our lives. *We are freed* to "give our all" with the *talents* our Father gives us to serve Him, His church, and His creation. *We are freed* to "give our all" with the *treasure* our Father gives us to enable His church to do it's work in His creation. God our Father gives each of us time, talent, and treasure ... in order for us to use all of them in service to Him and those we live amongst.

Many among us have heeded God's call. And I thank you for using your time and talent to serve God's people in many ways ... ushering and greeting ... reading ... as singers and musicians ... deacons ... teachers ... on church repair and cleanup crews ... on cooking and fellowship teams ... nursery helpers ... visiting those who are lonesome, sick, or unable to get out of the house ... and congregational and mission team leaders. Many among us also give generously of our treasure ... supporting the food bank ... disaster relief efforts ... overseas missions ... local charities ... and the church's weekly offering.

Some of us are still trying to figure out how to best use the gifts God has given us. So ... How is God calling you to "give your all?" Jesus isn't pleading for us to give away all of our possessions. He's just asking us to set aside some time, talent, and treasure to give freely and generously, first and foremost, back to Him ... from a heart totally devoted to the Lord.

Trusting Him fully and completely for all of our needs, we live in the sure understanding of God's grace ... unconcerned about what the future will bring because we trust God, the one who loves us beyond measure. In faith, we express our supreme confidence in His promise of forgiveness of our sins ... even those times we don't "give our all" ... and the promise of eternal life. We trust He will also help us to live now, blessed by His loving provision of time, talent, and treasure. We believe He will help us see the privilege He has endowed us with and then grow even more ready, willing, and able to "give our all" back to Him ... through these gifts and our very lives which He has given to us to do even more for Him and others in His creation. I pray for each of us this day:

Lord God, Father in heaven, thank You for the gift of life and the gifts of time, talent, and treasure that support and sustain this life You have given us. Thank You for opening our hearts and minds to the many ways we can use all of these gifts to serve You and Your creation in faithful love. Continue to open our hearts and minds through Your Word and the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal ways we can better use them so that we may truly "fear, love, and trust" You as we "give our all" in faith to You. *'May (You), the God of peace, equip us with everything good that we may do (Your) will. (Hebrews 13:20-22)* In Jesus' name. Amen.

James Kent