

A Complete Offering and Sacrifice

(Mark 12:38-44)

Sermon delivered by The Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
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Open our minds, O Lord, to the knowledge of your power, our spirits to the awareness of your presence, and our hearts to the overflowing of your love, and may we live and serve as reflections of these each day in your creation. Amen.

When it comes to giving – when it comes to sacrifice – how much is too much? How much is not enough? Is there such a thing as the right amount?

It sounds almost like a gospel according to Goldilocks: this porridge is too hot; this chair is too soft; this bed is just right. And I can see the look on some of your faces that I am once again about to plug away at stewardship, so let me dispel any apprehension building there: this is not going to be another stewardship sermon – not in the traditional sense. This morning I am going to go in a slightly different direction.

For me, today's passage from the Gospel of Mark could just as easily be leading us to question how much of ourselves is enough to give to God. We often talk of how much to pledge in terms of our financial resources, or of how we can offer a particular talent to the benefit of the parish. But how often do we talk of how much of our spirit ... our entire being ... we offer to the church?

In these verses we read of an impoverished widow putting two copper coins into the treasury. These two coins represented everything she had to live on. As she does this, Jesus sits across from the treasury, watching as one by one men and women, rich and poor, come to make their offering. He notes how many contribute out of their abundance, but this one poor widow has contributed from her poverty. And she has given everything. She gave two coins representing all of her financial resources ... everything she had on which to survive. But what she also gives is all of herself ... all of her faith ... all of her trust that God is with her.

In the Rite I service of Holy Eucharist we celebrate each week, I as part of the Eucharistic prayer speak lines that remind us of a particular gift we are to offer at the altar: "And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto thee."

Our souls and bodies. We are not saying that we come to the altar just to offer our financial support or to share a particular talent ... only those portions of the abundance of things of which God has blessed us. No, it is an offering of every bit of our being. We are not just offering back the tangible things with which we have been blessed; we are offering back the very aspects of ourselves that are of God. We are offering back the very dual nature of our

existence: the earthly body with which we worship and praise God and live and act in the world, and the soul that is the essence of God within us.

I see that in the image of this poor widow, walking to the treasury with the two coins she is about to leave. But she is offering much, much more. She is sharing every bit of herself – the earthly and tangible as well as the spiritual part of herself linking her to her Father. Jesus points out those who give of their earthly abundance, and in pointing out this widow he is pointing to someone who is giving of her spiritual abundance.

Was she apprehensive? I do not for one moment doubt that she was. It is a frightening thing to know that you are about to give away all you have. Think back to the encounter with the rich man of a few weeks ago, and how apprehensive he was when he was told that eternal reward was his if he sold everything and gave it away. I think this woman was as well ... but not one time do you see anything indicating she hesitated.

Yes, I talk about the things that are in the spaces of these readings as much as they are in the text. She may very well have paused. She might have been standing in line and thought several times about turning and returning to her home. Perhaps she even questioned whether in the midst of the significant gifts being offered her own, tiny offering was even needed. I can imagine her saying, "I'm not quite able to help today, but Lord willing ... soon." There may even be a feeling similar to one that I have had in the past, a little inside voice that said, "I don't know if I can do that."

As I have learned in my journey, the exact offering for any given moment was always there. It was the gift not just of money or talent, but of myself. That is true for each one of you as well. Often we do not see them coming ... those miraculous moments when the full offering of ourselves is needed. The poor widow undoubtedly did not see it coming that day when she walked to the treasury, and I in no way feel she thought she would be a model of being a reasonable, living sacrifice.

But she was, and she still is. And we can do the same. Our earthly apprehension and fear is nothing when confronted with the power of God's love and the strength of all that binds us to him. Whenever we feel we cannot, turn to God and remember that yes indeed, we can.

We can offer all that we have and all that we are and know that we are giving in return the fullest measure of all that God has given.

Amen.