

Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: Mark 12:38-44
Related text: 1 Kings 17:8-16
Date Preached: November 8, 2009
Youth Sunday

When people are in need, one of the first places they will come is to the church. Regardless of whether one worships in a given congregation or even believes in God, many who are in need see the church as the place that will respond to their needs.

We heard in the Gospel reading the story of a widow who comes to the treasury. She clearly has a need. But the need is not what we might think.

She doesn't ask for food from the synagogue food bank. She doesn't plead a case for needing help with fuel oil. As a widow in biblical times, her income is severely limited. Women didn't just go out and find a job in early first century Judaism. That was not the cultural norm.

Rather her need is quite simple. This described poor widow has a need to give. There is nothing in her bank account. There is no money tucked neatly under the mattress. There is no social security or pension fund for her to fall back upon.

Yet, it is her need to give that drives her to put into the treasury her two coins. Who does that in 2009?

In fact, who does such things over the past hundred years? This is illogical to us. This is certainly not part of an American capitalistic lifestyle. The only person that may come to our mind as doing such a thing is Mother Theresa.

So is this simply another Biblical passage that we lift up as a good but unrealistic thing to do in today's world? What relevance does it have for us today?

If we simply look at a passage and use it as a means to say, give more money to the church, then yes, I believe we miss the point. If we dismiss it as an ideological but impractical ideal, then we also have missed the point.

The point of this passage is that giving is not simply what good people do; giving is an act of faith. In fact, how we manage our whole personal and congregational wealth is a matter of faith.

We say the right words at least every Sunday. "Give us this day our daily bread", we pray. As Lutherans we understand that daily bread goes well beyond leavened, unleavened, whole-wheat, rye or pumpernickel.

Daily bread for us as stated in Luther's small catechism is, "Everything our bodies need such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, fields, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright workers, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends (including those on facebook), faithful neighbors and the like."

Since we believe this to be true, since we pray this as our Lord taught, since we know that God hears our prayers and that God even gives daily bread to the believe and unbeliever, then giving for us is an act of faith. It is an act of thanksgiving.

A couple weeks ago, we heard the story of a rich man who came to Jesus and asked "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus reply to him was to sell you own, "give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." To this the rich man left in grief because he had many possessions.

We continually fight our human instincts to keep something back for when we are in need. We fight our instincts to use our money as a voice to approve or disapprove of decisions. And in the midst of such

wrestling, there are those who give what they have in faith.

We have already entered a season of giving. We've given food for our food pantry, bars of soap, detergent, shampoo for the soap drive, and we'll ask you to give generously at the salad bar for children at Glade Run who only have what is given them.

Yet giving goes beyond supporting things we value or feel are worthy. Giving is an act of faith in God. To give is to trust God to give all we need and we know God will do this for us and for all humanity.

This is the same God who has given the world the gift of his Son. Jesus gave his total self, his very life for the life of the world. He did this out of love. "For God so loved the world (you, me, our best friends, the black sheep of the family, the wealthiest and the poorest) so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."

That is what God has done. His Son is the 100% investment and ransom God paid for us. Nothing is held back. We give out our thanksgiving. We give as an act of faith.