

---

## *Out Of Our Poverty*

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**Proper 27B in the Episcopal Lectionary**  
**1 Kings 17.8-16**  
**Mark 12. 38-44**

*"She, out of her poverty, put in everything she had."*  
Mark 12.44

These days, our church needs some Mark Twain. A businessman, of questionable ethics once declared to Mark Twain, "Before I die, I want to climb to the top of Mount Sinai and read the Ten Commandments aloud!" Twain replied, "Well, I have a better idea. Why don't you stay right here and keep them?"

I need to talk about the widow's mite this morning. That's the gospel passage. And it means that it's time to talk about money. Mark Twain once said that it's the widow's mite that counts.

"Some years ago, in Hartford," he reported, we all went to church on a hot, sweltering night, to hear the annual report of Mr. Hawley, a city missionary. He told of life in the cellars where poverty resided; he gave instances of the heroism and devotion of the poor."

"The poor are always good to each other," Twain said. "When a man with millions gives, we make a great deal of noise, but it's noise in the wrong place. For it's the widow's mite that counts."

Then, Twain goes on: "This Mr. Hawley worked me up to a great state. I couldn't wait for him to get through. I had four hundred dollars in my pocket. I wanted to give that and borrow more to give. You could see greenbacks in every eye. But Mr. Hawley didn't pass the plate, and it grew hotter, and we got sleepier. My enthusiasm went down, down, down "" one hundred dollars at a time. (I was going to give just three hundred dollars, then two hundred dollars), till finally when the plate did come round, I stole ten cents from it."

When the Cathedral of St. Philip, last week, conducted the annual Requiem Eucharist for the Homeless, this place was full of the poor. There were some of us not so poor, but most of the congregation were the homeless. And when the time came for the offertory, we passed the plate. Some folks always ask, "Why do you collect money during the Homeless Eucharist? Aren't these people are poor? Shouldn't we be giving to them?"

Well, of course we should. But we also had to give them a chance to give. We took up an offering that night, which was to provide MARTA tokens for distribution. There were six hundred and thirty one people in the service that night, and the offering came to five hundred and sixty-three dollars. I'm sure that not everybody gave something. And I'm also sure that some guys probably put in everything they had in their pocket. The principle is this: Everyone needs a chance to give, not just to receive.

Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Most of us, especially most of us gathered in this room this morning, have a hard time being poor. We are accustomed to giving out of our abundance, just like the people in Jesus' time. He watched that day at the Temple. And he saw most people give out of their abundance, which means they gave out of plenty, out of their excess. Jesus saw a lot of people give to the Temple treasury out of what they had left over. Financial people define this "excess" giving as "discretionary income." It is what we have left over. Many people give to the church out of their discretionary income, what they have left over. We did it in Jesus' time, and we do it still today. Jesus watches all of it. Jesus sees.

But one day Jesus saw something else. He saw a poor widow come and put in two small, copper coins, the equivalent of one penny in today's currency: the widow's mite. He pointed that woman out and said, "She has put in more than everyone else." More than everyone else.

Why was it more? Because, Jesus said, everyone else gave of their abundance, out of their excess. The widow gave out of her poverty, and she gave everything she had. Jesus saw it.

I talk about tithing every year, in sermons and in stewardship letters; and, each year, a few more Episcopalians try it. The decision to give ten percent of one's income to the Church is an amazing freedom. When we actually give ten percent of our income away, we begin to realize that God does not care about the ten percent; God cares for one hundred per cent. God cares about the person who puts into the temple treasury all she had, not out of what she had left over.

It is said that J. Paul Getty, at one time the richest man in the world, installed a pay phone in his mansion for his friends and relatives to use. When asked directly, "How much is enough?" he answered, "Just a little more."

How much money does anyone need to make in order to be satisfied? Most of us have no exact answer. The typical answer is just like Getty's. "How much do you need? Well, more than I'm making now. Well, more."

That answer shows how little control we really have over our money. Instead, our money, or our love of money, controls us. It has been noted that the word "Mammon" in the Bible really refers to the personification of wealth. "Mammon" is the realization that money can be a pagan God, a higher power, an idol. When Jesus said "You cannot serve both God and Mammon," he did not mean Mammon just as money; he meant money as a god.

Surely that is true in our time as well. Money is a kind of god today. People worship it. People strain and crave and struggle for it. They end up serving it. They end up being controlled by it, or at least the love of it. Paul said to Timothy that the "love of money --not money itself-- but the love of money is the root of all evil."

There was a local minister who answered the telephone one day. Hello, said the voice, is this Reverend Smith? Yes it is. Well, hello, this is the IRS; can you help us? Yes I can. Do you know a man named Bill Robinson? Yes, I do. Is he a member of your congregation? Yes he is. Well now, did he donate \$20,000 to the church? The minister said, " He will."

Money can get us into trouble. But money can also free us. Money can deliver us, too, when we use it well, and when we learn to give it. Money can deliver us, when we learn to give it away. The more generous we are with our money, the freer we are from it. And the freer we are from it, the more we can use it properly and healthfully.

This is what Jesus saw in the widow who gave everything she had. Jesus saw an amazing freedom, a freedom that most of us may only approach. But we can approach it. We can learn that freedom by learning two principles today.

The first principle is this: every person has something to give to God. Every person has a gift.

Just because your gift does not seem as large as your neighbor's is no reason to believe that you are less important to God. Just because your gift is larger than your neighbor's is no reason to think that you are more important to God. You are neither more important, nor less important, to God, than your neighbor.

But here's the second principle in the kingdom. God wants you to give from the very place where you think you have nothing. This is what Jesus means when he says "This woman gave out of her poverty."

Poverty means, of course, being poor. It means lacking. All of us, from the richest to the poorest, are lacking in something. All of us are poor in something.

And here is the principle. Whatever we are poorest in, is what we should be offering to God.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

What are you poor in?

Are you poor in money? Yes, money has a peculiar seduction to it. Yes, most of us, no matter how much money we have, say to ourselves, "You know, why don't I feel like I have enough?" No matter how much we have, we sometimes feel poor in money. Are you poor in money? Give it away.

Are you poor in spirit? Do you feel depressed? Yes, that is the modern malaise, isn't it? Some of us may be clinically diagnosed as depressed, but many more of us worry about it now. Am I suffering from depression? Are you poor in spirit? Then give from that place.

Yes, even if you claim you are poor in spirit, try to give some spirit away. Go up to somebody and encourage them, instead of waiting for them to encourage you. Give somebody some spirit.

Are you poor in confidence? Give somebody else some confidence.

Are you poor in love? You don't think you have enough? Then give some love to someone else.

It's amazing what will happen. Jesus put it this way. The measure you give will be the measure you receive. He didn't mean it as a reward. It is a fact, a principle, a fact of life. "Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6.37-38).

This is why the widow was blessed. When she gave out of her poverty, she was receiving everything.

One more story:

At one church meeting, a very wealthy man rose to tell the rest of those present about his Christian Faith. "I'm a millionaire," he said, "and I attribute my wealth to the blessings of God in my life."

He went on to recall the turning point of his faith. As a young man he had just earned his first dollar and he went to a church meeting that night. At that meeting was a missionary who discussed his work. At the time of the offering to go to the work of this missionary the wealthy man knew that he would either have to give it all to God or nothing at all.

So at that moment he decided to give all that he had to God. Looking back he knew that God had blessed that decision and had made him wealthy.

When he had finished there was an awed silence. As he moved to his seat and sat down a little old lady leaned over to him and said: "I dare you to do it again."

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

---

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*