

Christ Episcopal Church

90 Kings Highway

Middletown, New Jersey 07748

The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 27 (B)

November 11, 2018

Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“All In”

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 12:38-44

As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in

the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but

she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Dear Lord, help us to love one another as you have loved us. Amen.

The priest-in-charge of a large church had a small sign behind his chair that read, “I am the boss.” One day one of his administrative staff taped a note to the sign that read, “The Warden called. She wants her sign back!”

One theologian has noted that perfect clergy matches to churches are made in heaven, but so also are thunder, lightning,

tornados, and hail. So due caution is in order for calling a new priest.

We have a “tendency to compartmentalize – to put God in a box – to go to Sunday School and church on Sunday morning and go about our business the rest of the week. We’re like the little four-year-old girl who, when the minister came to her home to visit, asked him, “Would you like to see Jesus?” He said, “Why, of course I would!” She ran to her closet, climbed up on a chair and got a little ceramic figure of Jesus down and brought it for him to see. “That’s beautiful,” he said, “Thank you for

showing it to me.” “You’re welcome,” she replied, “Now I’ve got to go and put Jesus back on the shelf where he belongs.”

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/mark-102-16-straight-talk-about-stewardship-mclarty/>

We can’t take it with us ... but we can’t help wishing we could. Many have a fascination about getting to the Pearly Gates and needing a little cash.

The story is told of three men who went to the funeral home to pay their respects to a mutual friend. The first looked at the body

and said, “I don’t know if we’ll need money in heaven or not, but I’d hate to think ole Charlie would wake up and be caught short.” With that, he took a twenty-dollar bill out of his wallet and slipped it into Charlie’s coat pocket. The second man said, “That’s awfully nice of you, and, to tell you the truth, I owed Charlie some money.” With that, he took out a twenty-dollar bill and slipped it into Charlie’s coat pocket. The third man said, “Well, I don’t think we’re going to need money in heaven, and I certainly didn’t owe Charlie anything, but I feel like I ought to follow suit. So, he took out his checkbook and wrote a check for

fifty dollars and slipped it into Charlie's coat pocket, and then he took the two twenties in change.

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/mark-102-16-straight-talk-about-stewardship-mclarty/>

In today's gospel lesson, I think we should be amazed that anyone, particularly Jesus, is watching as people put their money into the offering plate. I don't know about you, but I am hoping this is a one-time first century thing. Or, is Jesus in the business of looking inside my offering envelope? I worked at a church in midtown Manhattan

early in my lay church career that never had an Every Member Canvass. As I inquired why they never asked anyone to pledge, I learned that in 1946, the year after the end of World War II, that that church listed the pledge amounts of every pledger. Fifty years later, they never had had another Every Member Canvass. My wife and I naively took on that job when I was on the Vestry, and lo and behold, the pledges doubled in less than two years. However, the pledges are safely secret and only the Treasurer and a few others and the Rector see them. But can you imagine my surprise when I was a community meeting down in

Trenton, New Jersey, several years ago, I saw on the bulletin board a listing of just that, the pledge amounts of every single member. Wow. And that church still stands. I am of the general opinion that there is no way many Episcopal churches could do that and survive.

Yet, the Gospel story today is preserved both in the oldest Gospel, Mark, and the latest gospel, Luke, so it seems to have an air of profound authenticity about it. Our first thought in today's world is who will support this poor widow tomorrow? I guess the answer is, God, and her neighbors.

One of my parishioners while I was Rector was a young Anglican from another country. He was a missionary to the inner city with a nearby evangelical group. One Sunday just preceding Christmas the offering plate went around in one of our Sunday congregations who largely worshipped with us because we had a free lunch program. I actually saw him quietly put in a twenty-dollar bill into the offering plate, the most anyone had given in that congregation, ever. After the service I spoke to him and learned that he had no close relatives to be with to enjoy

Thanksgiving dinner. I felt very sorry for him, as my wife and I were also far from home, but we could usually travel to some distant relative's home, and we would generally not be alone for Christmas. After Christmas I spoke to him about what had happened and learned that one of his friends in the Midwest just happened to write him a letter that he got the Monday before Christmas that asked him to join their family gathering for Christmas. Also enclosed was a money order and a round fare bus ticket to the friend's home. A few years later, he went on to find another job in another US city, earned enough to go to graduate school,

earned his PhD, and now he teaches theology.

In 2006, Pastor Phil McLarty wrote: “in 1973 I was serving as student pastor of a small church in Prosper, Texas, just north of Dallas. We had a Board of Trustees that looked after the property. They wanted to buy a vacant lot across the street from the church for parking and for future development. The price was \$8,000, which was a lot of money in those days, particularly for a small congregation. To raise the money, the chairman of the board asked the others to join him in making a

pledge. He hoped that would serve as a catalyst for the rest of the congregation to follow suit. We met in the basement of the church around folding tables. There were eight men and one woman. Her name was Mary James. She and her husband, Larry, had two young children. Larry worked in McKinney for Fisher Controls. Mary ran a small beauty shop next to their house. They were doing all right, but they didn't have a lot of discretionary income. So, it sort of put Mary in a bind to be asked to make a pledge right there in front of the others. But she was a faithful member of the church and she was proud to be member of the Board of

Trustees, and she wanted to do her part. The chairman passed out little slips of paper, and, like the others, Mary jotted down her pledge. Then one of the men went around the table and collected them in his hat and took them to the chairman, who tallied them up and read the results. Most were for a hundred dollars a year. When he got to Mary's pledge, it read, 'One haircut per week.' He paused for a moment with a puzzled look on his face, then he asked Mary, 'How much do you get for a haircut.' She said, '\$5.00'. He did the math and put down the amount of Mary's pledge. \$260. More than two and half times the others.

Yet, not all at once. One haircut per week. It was her pledge of support and a symbol of her devotion to God.”

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/mark-102-16-straight-talk-about-stewardship-mclarty/>

I don't know if stewardship is an issue here at Christ Church or not, but I am supplying at another church next month that wants a Warden to preach on stewardship instead of me. I have graciously given up my sermon time--too bad that it might not be warm enough next Saturday for my wife Jan and I to go golfing.

My particular inspiration which generally should assure that I will never be asked to return to supply at a church is the following: we generally ask people to increase their pledge every year; but my insight now about that is that why would one be motivated to give more than perhaps a ‘cost of living’ increase, indexed to inflation? So, my idea is that if we feel we are not getting proper value, then why give more? But then I thought, we only give more if we are getting more; that’s common sense, isn’t it? But then I figured, whose responsibility is it for us to ‘get more’? Is it only the Rector’s or the Vestry’s responsibility to ‘give us

more'? Or, do we ourselves participate in 'getting more'? I think I have a role to play in my 'getting more'; if I am praying more, perhaps due to circumstances out of my control, or perhaps due to some good thought I got from a homily or a Bible study, then I have gotten more, and I am closer to God and more in tune with the Holy Spirit who dwells within me. If I am serving more, reading my Bible more, praying more, and perhaps giving more time to the church as a volunteer, then I am not only giving more, I am getting more. Wala! And if I review my life during the past few months or year and I find my faith is

increasing and my service is also increasing, then I am motivated to give more. So, we each have some responsibility for ‘getting more’ out of our church each week; and if that’s the case for me, then I should give more. What do you think? Is this idea worth the price of a haircut, no longer \$5 each where most of us live today, or one latte per week, or one lottery ticket, or one whatever cost we may have that is not always necessary each week?

I want to tell you about a small five-year old in the congregation I regularly serve in Connecticut; he may be a bit small for his

age, but he is the most outgoing child in our small Sunday School. I will call him Jimmy. Jimmy is always smiling, and he loves to volunteer anytime he is able-- helping take up the offering is one of his favorite things. But one summer Sunday, the older acolytes were all away, and we turned to Jimmy and asked him if he would like to be the crucifer if we could find a cross he could carry, and he quickly agreed. We found a small cross, and I instructed him briefly before the service what he was supposed to do, and he was amazing in how well and quickly he learned. But one part of the crucifer's duty at that church is to hold

the Gospel as the priest reads it in the midst of the congregation. So Jimmy carried this somewhat cumbersome heavy gospel book in a shiny brass cover, and he turned and faced me as he had been instructed—remember he is only about five years old. But when he held it, it was around my knee level and a bit askew, but fortunately I had on glasses that allowed me to read from knee level. His mom was sitting in a pew very near him, and when she saw that Jimmy was holding the Gospel askew, she quietly got up and came up behind and beside him. I was secretly dreading that she would take the Gospel book away from him

and hold it up herself. But, no, what she did was to gently rebalance the Gospel book in his hands, so it was horizontal, and then she sat back down. I am not so sure other parents would have been so gentle, or permissive, but she was. Jimmy proudly continued to hold the book, and at the Eucharist he stood beside me at the altar, even though he could not see above the altar, nor could anyone see him, but he remained completely involved during the entire celebration. What his mother did was amazing, I thought—she empowered Jimmy, gave him courage, and refused any urge to

embarrass him. Jimmy did not have to suffer more to do the work of Jesus.

Hopefully, we see how God also comes behind and beside us in our time of need, and we too experience the healing presence that only God can bring to us. Let us celebrate the wonders and blessings of the life of our Lord and begin to celebrate more fully the opportunities we have to serve Our Risen and Ascended Lord.

The widow gave her all. She still stands as the model giver of all time.

Amen.

Description:

Jesus sees our gifts and knows our hearts.

Tags:

Child, children, mother, father, parents, grandparents, gospel, acolyte, crucifer, church, celebrate, blessings, Jesus, Lord, Christ, God, Eucharist, cross, suffer, empower, Holy, Spirit, offering, stewardship, pledge, cost, living, index, inflation, little, haircut, latte, lottery, gift, stewardship, pray, Bible, study, mite, penny, copper, widow, Christmas

St. Raphael the Archangel

Episcopal Church

1520 Route 88

Brick, New Jersey 08724

Proper 27 (B)

Sunday, November 8, 2015

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“The widow’s mite”

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 12:38-44

As Jesus taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long

robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are

contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Open our hearts with generosity, Dear Lord, for we put our trust in you. Amen.

The story is told of a man known for being extremely cheap, a Jack Benny type, who went into a shop to find a present for a business acquaintance. To his dismay there were no inexpensive items for sale, except for a vase that had been broken in three pieces. He purchased it for practically

nothing and asked the store to mail it for him. He wanted the recipient to think the vase had been broken during delivery. A week later he received a note. It read simply, “Thank you for the vase. It was especially nice of you to wrap each piece separately.”

Spike Milligan said, “Money can’t buy friends, but you can get a better class of enemy!”

We recall the story of another widow, a contemporary person whose marriage had been to the church. Her maiden name was

Anjeze Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, (Gonxhe meaning "rosebud" or "little flower" in Albanian). She was born in 1910, the daughter of an Albanian grocer in Skopje who was involved in Albanian politics and who died in 1919 when she was only eight years old. Skopje is now the capital of the eastern European county of Macedonia. She decided to become a nun at the age of 18 in 1928. She arrived in India in 1929 and took her first religious vows as a nun in 1931 when she was twenty, and she took her final vows in 1937 in Calcutta when she was twenty-six; in 1946 when she was thirty-six years old she said she received [quote] "the

call within the call,” the call within the call.” She heard, “I was to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them. It was an order. To fail would have been to break the faith” [end quote]. She felt God calling her to leave her convent, which was the equivalent of becoming a widow, and help the poor in the Indian city of Calcutta where she had served as a nun for nine years. She began her missionary work with the poor in 1948, replacing her traditional Loreto habit with a simple white cotton sari decorated with a blue border. She adopted Indian citizenship, spent a few months in Patna, India, to receive basic medical

training in the Holy Family Hospital and then ventured out into the slums of Calcutta. From Wikipedia: She began a mission to care for (in her own words) “the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone.” She began anew as a small community in 1948 with 12 members in Calcutta, and today it has over 5,000 Sisters running orphanages, AIDS hospices, charity centers worldwide, and caring for refugees, the blind, disabled, aged, alcoholics, the poor

and homeless and victims of floods, epidemics and famine in Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, Europe and Australia. She was less than five feet tall, but her influence was enormous. By the time she died in 1997, she had built over 500 hospitals, clinics, shelters, and youth centers in 100 countries all over the world, including the United States. The first Missionaries of Charity home in the United States was established in the South Bronx, New York. She lectured at Harvard University before a graduation class speaking on the virtue of chastity and received a thunderous, standing ovation.

When she died in 1997, her body was laid in state at St. Timothy's Church in Calcutta, India. The ambulance that carried her body away had the single word MOTHER on its windshield. She had spent her entire life as a surrogate mother to the abandoned, the helpless, and the forgotten. She was of course Mother Theresa. She had given her mite to our world, and we shall be ever grateful for her witness to us. She had lived in poverty all of her life, but the rich, the powerful, and the famous felt the presence of God's mighty Spirit when they were in her presence, and they were fearfully in awe. The presence of the on-looking God was

very much with Mother Theresa because of her wonderful example of what selfless giving can do for an entire world.

When we hold nothing back from God and dare to see everything including ourselves as belonging to God, great things happen. Rather than being acquisitive persons always bent on getting, let us be Eucharistic persons continually giving thanksgiving for all of God's blessings.

In Orio, Japan, a small Korean church saw its survival dependent on being able to move away from being beside a dangerous and dusty set of railroad tracks. So, they began raising money for a new building in a

better location. One of the parishioners they visited in their fund-raising efforts was a poor newly married sign maker who worked out of his small apartment. The man pledged \$5,000 over three years in order to help his church survive. He said this meant he would donate all the orders he made on Saturdays to the church. In the first year alone, the sign maker gave \$4,000, and he gave a total of \$14,000 over three years. When his pastor asked how he had felt called to do this sacrificial giving, the man told the pastor, “A few years ago I heard for the first time the good news of Jesus Christ. He has changed my life. He has given me

meaning and purpose in life. And I want others to find what I found. One way to do that is by making sure we have a church to share that good news with others. That's why I give."

Why do we give? Is it out of joy and commitment? Is God calling us to give of our all?

The widow put in enough to buy one sacrifice of a pigeon, the smallest portion one could conceive. But her gift has become for us a symbol of how we can become great in God's eyes. She gave all she could. It is not the amount we give, it is

the proportion we give of what we have that is important.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Weimer, senior pastor of North Avenue Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia, wrote in an essay entitled, “What God Values in Stewardship:

<http://day1.org/1555->

[what_god_values_in_stewardship](#)

“Something else is at work in this woman [in our gospel lesson]. For her to give such an extravagant gift, she must be giving from A Grateful Spirit. Her gratitude is unspoken, but it is clearly her motivation in

giving. Why else would one give so much from the little she had? She gave with a grateful spirit.

‘Dr. Michael McCullough is a psychologist and the editor of the book, “The Psychology of Gratitude.” In an interview on public radio, Dr. McCullough said scientific research reveals what many of us have been taught by our grandmothers all along--taking time daily to be grateful for the blessings in our lives--leads to a higher degree of satisfaction and sense of well-being. He says: “Your grandmother was right. When people are encouraged to take a

few moments, every day, even as little time as two or three minutes a day, to simply appreciate a few positive things that typically somebody else did for us, we end up feeling better at the end of the day about our life in general. We see boosts in positive emotion. We see reductions in negative emotion. People are more satisfied with their lives as a whole....They even sleep better at night! And they are more prone to spiritual pursuits.”

‘Scientific research backs up what the Bible has said all along. The Psalmist says it in Psalm 100: “Enter God's gates with

thanksgiving!” The Apostle Paul says:

“Give thanks in all things.”

(I Thessalonians 5:18). Jesus encourages

daily thanksgiving in the Lord's Prayer:

“Give us this day our daily bread,” and Jesus

always gave thanks before a meal (Matthew

6:11). A grateful heart is a foundation of an

emotionally and spiritually healthy life. We

would all do well to take time each and

every day to count our many blessings.

‘The woman in our gospel story has a grateful spirit for God's blessings in her life.

Jesus affirms her because she is giving for

all the right reasons—she gave with a

genuine heart for God and with a grateful spirit.

‘And there's one more thing going on. The woman's genuine heart for God and grateful spirit motivate her to give with A Generous Attitude.

Her gift is clearly the most generous of all-- not in the amount of the gift but in the sacrifice behind it. Jesus says, “All of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” The widow had a generous attitude.

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_hannah_and_2.htm

Seattle area Lutheran Pastor Edward

Markquart writes:

“This little old lady in our gospel today is a model in the Bible of a person who is excessively generous. She is one of the four people in the New Testament who are living examples of what it means to give generously. First is Zacchaeus, the short little man who defrauded everybody around. Jesus came to his house and got into his heart, and Zacchaeus then announced he would repay everyone double the amount he

stole from them and give half his goods to the poor. Zacchaeus gave way beyond what the law required; that's what happens when Jesus gets into your heart. The second living example was Barnabas in the book of Acts 4:36-37 who sold his property and gave all the proceeds to the apostles for the work of spreading the gospel. Again, he was far more generous than the Old Testament law required. The third example of enormous generosity was the church in Macedonia. This congregation is described in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, which is the classic passage on giving in the New Testament. The words, "enormously generous" or "rich

in generosity” are repeated at least five times in this passage. And the widow who gave her two pennies, all she had, is the fourth example of enormous generosity in the New Testament.”

The Rev. Dr. Francis H. Wade, once interim dean of the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, wrote, “We are hardwired for generosity and when we live that way, it shows in our faces and in our lives. It’s not about giving, it is not about making a gesture. It's about the way we live, and the key word is generosity.”

God does call us to be deeply concerned for those in need. God calls us to give quietly and generously. God calls us first to give our hearts--and then to measure our gifts not just by what we give but also by what we have left, a spirit to serve the Lord with all we are.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.