

November 11, 2018
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44

The Widow Gives More

Two copper coins drop into the offering boxes of the Temple treasury. Clink. Clink. Two little coins. Hardly worth a penny. Hardly worth noticing. Hardly worth anything. Clink. Clink. It's the sound of loose change in the cup holder in your car. Two coins falling from your pocket onto the pavement. Clink. Clink. Hardly worth going after. Hardly worth picking up. Hardly worth it. But Jesus notices. He notices a widow's offering. And her offering is worth more to him. It's worth more than all the rest. Because it costs the widow more. She has put in everything she has, says Jesus. Of all the people contributing, she he has put in more. It's just a couple of copper coins, worth about a penny. The kind of coins that get lost among the bigger offerings. The kind that get lost in all the noise at the Temple in Jerusalem. That no one notices in the bustling commotion of everyone bringing their offerings to God. The temple was not a quiet place. It was full of the sound of people talking and singing. Animals meant to be sacrificed, mooing and bleating. Priests, praying and directing traffic. Pharisees and scribes, arguing and

debating about scripture. You would hardly notice a widow. You would hardly notice her dropping two little coins into the offering box.

There were other things that would catch your attention. Other offerings that would be hard to miss. Piles of coins given with great fanfare that would make your eyes pop. Tradition has it that at the inner court of the Temple where the treasury was there were boxes lining the walls, thirteen in all. On top of these offering boxes were large metal funnels shaped like trumpets. When money was dropped in, the sound of the coins was amplified by the metal ‘trumpets’ for everyone to hear.

Everyone would hear the sound of a pile of shekels being unloaded.

Everyone would have noticed the resonant cascade, and the ceremony and attention given to it. Large donations like that would sound like ‘cha-ching’ and ‘ta-da’. And people would gasp, ‘would you look at that?’ and ‘oh my what a gift!’ And people in the Temple would be oohing and ahing and congratulating the donor on their generosity and asking them where they would like their plaque on the Temple wall.

Everyone would notice that. But the widow’s two tiny coins: Not so

much. Jesus says to his disciples, “Listen to me, this widow has put in MORE. She has put in all she has.”

This nameless widow has put in more than anyone else, Jesus says to us. But how could it be MORE? How could her two little coins worth about a penny, be worth MORE than the big money from the big donors? How could her offering be worth MORE than the offerings from the rich and the wealthy, who deposit enormous sums with a flourish and give the Temple more financial security? How could her penny’s worth of coins be MORE? How could they mean more for the budget? Or more for God?

More is more. More money means more resources. It means more to do more with. It means more options and more choices, more to invest and more to spend. More is more. And we might believe that now especially during stewardship season. Large sums of money sound good to us right about now. Large sums of money mean our little church can keep going. It means more for the future. It means more that we can do in our community. It means more certainty and that John and Diana won’t have to lie awake at night, worrying if we will survive. Because we will

survive, if we have more. That's what the world tells us. That more insures we will stay alive.

We want to stay alive. We want to survive. But the way we follow with Jesus, it is not about survival. With him, more does not mean more life. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God. Bigger offerings do not mean bigger faith, because the rich have given out of their abundance. And it costs them nothing. They will hardly miss it. But the widow with her two coins, she has given more than she can afford. She has given though she doesn't have enough and she might not survive. She has given and now all she has left is faith. All she has left now is God. Listen up, disciples, Jesus says, it's not the amount of money you give that matters to God. It's how much of YOU that you give. How much of your ALL that you put in God's hands and risk for the sake of love.

Those two little coins that the widow put in the offering put her at risk. What she offered to God was all that she had, everything she had to live on. Jesus knew this widow's offering was not something she had sat down and carefully reasoned through. She had not calculated up what

was safe and rational and set it aside. She gave without considering what made sense for her, which doesn't make sense, if you ask me. It doesn't make sense that she gave what she didn't have.

This widow's future was at risk. Widows in Jesus' time lived on the very edge of survival. They were always in danger of starving or being subjected to abuse. A widow had no husband in a patriarchal society, and had no one obligated to look after them. Everyone could assume that it wasn't their responsibility. Which is why God commanded the people over and over again to look after widows because they had nothing to live on but faith. They depended on compassion. They depended on the generosity of strangers. They depended on those who had MORE to look after them.

But it's a risk to depend on others. It's risky to live by faith. Because you risk losing something. You risk your security for the future. Like the church that supports a youth program though it puts their bank account at risk. Or the family that risks loving the neighbor though they aren't from around here. Faith is never safe. It's always risky. And it puts our

future in God's hands. Because we don't know what will happen, but we trust that love is worth the risk.

We also risk not getting what we want when we love. We risk things not happening the way we want them to, when we offer what we have. Like when you give your grandmother's pin to your daughter-in-law, but she doesn't wear it how she should. Or when you give your armchair to your neighbor, and he puts it in the garage it hold his paint cans. Or you give a beautifully crocheted blanket to a new baby and only a few years later, it's being used for blanket forts and picnics with Cheetos and grape soda. It is a risk to give because what you give, you surrender it. You surrender your hopes for it. You surrender your agenda for it. That is the risk of love. You give because you hope it will matter. You give that love because of what you believe and because of what's in your heart, not what's in theirs.

The widow gives her two little coins because she has faith. She puts them to the Temple treasury even though it's not the wisest use of her money. Jesus says that the people at the Temple don't care about her. They don't notice her or her hardship for that matter. Jesus tells us that

the scribes from the temple want people to notice them and their ‘faith’ in God. They want people to notice their nice clothes and their nice manners. They want people to notice their wonderful prayers and their wonderful offerings. They try to show that they are faithful, but they aren’t faithful. They don’t risk anything for anyone. They don’t notice the widows and their constant need. Instead, they devour them and their houses. The word ‘devour’ in Greek literally means to eat down, to consume until there is nothing left. These scribes lived at the expense of others.

Maybe it was too much of a risk to help the widows. Once you help one, you have to help them all. You have to confront a system that works against women and works against the poor. If the scribes did that, they would risk their own survival. They would risk their livelihoods. It would be better not to notice. It would be better not be swallowed up by the needs of the world. It’s better to believe that the widows did something wrong. They committed some kind of sin and deserved their situation in life. How much safer is it to blame the poor, and judge the poor, and refuse to help the poor because we think it’s not worth it?

Because they might use our gifts unwisely? Because we get so much less from the poor than from the rich? “Beware of the scribes, Jesus says. Beware the religious folks who look like they are doing more for God but have less love than anyone else.” The only thing more they will get is more condemnation in the end.

Two little coins go into the offering. Clink. Clink. They are not worth much to the world, but worth so much more to God. This widow knows the risk. She knows she is stepping out in faith. She knows she is surrendering her life to God. She knows that these coins will go to the same system that defrauds widows like her. The same system that overlooks and ignores her. That her offering will make very little difference to the Temple. But she doesn't give because of who they are, she gives because of who she is. It's not about their faith. It's about her faith. And that's what Jesus wants us to notice. It's not about the money. It's about us and our faith and how much of ourselves we are willing to risk. Because aren't we glad that God's love isn't reasonable? Aren't we glad it isn't logical? Aren't we glad that God doesn't take a calculated look us and decide what will be most effective and efficient? Aren't we

glad that Love will go to the cross for us and get up on Easter morning for us? Are we glad that Love is, by nature, a risk? Because if it doesn't cost something, then it's not love.

Those two little coins going in the offering box—clink, clink--they don't sound like much. They don't look like much. They aren't much. But it's all the widow has. Look, Jesus says, look. Look at her faith. Look at her risking everything. Look at her trusting that her faithfulness is what matters to God. With her last two coins, she has given MORE than anyone else. Look, says Jesus. Notice her offering. Notice those risky offerings around you made for the sake of love. Notice those giving-your-life-to-others moments. Look. And listen. Notice. Because Jesus will go up to Jerusalem and give his life. He will risk everything for us. For this world, he will surrender what little he has to God. And it won't look like much to the world. It will look like an arrest. It will sound like a conviction of guilt. It will look like nails driven into a cross. And it will sound like a man breathing his last and committing his spirit to God. And a stone being rolled against a grave. Clink. Clink. This little offering will not look like much or sound like much. And yet it is more

than any other offering. It will be more to us than any gift. Because this is faithfulness. This is God risking God's self for us. This is love.

Love is a risk. It is a risk to live our lives for the Kingdom of God. We risk our comfort. We risk our plans for the future. We risk our own desires and dreams. We trust God will do what we can't do alone when we risk ourselves to care for widows and orphans. And look after the foreigner and alien resident. And support the least and the last. And serve others instead of being served. What of ourselves can we offer? What will we risk for the sake of love? What might we surrender in order to live by faith?