

Money Talks...but Needs a Translator

[Text - Mark 12:41-44]

Pastor Dave Shackle

November 8, 2015

This week, as we United States citizens got through another expensive election, I got to thinking about *Citizens United*. In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court opened the floodgate for corporations to invest massive amounts of money in political candidates and issues. In *Citizens United versus Federal Election Commission*, five Supreme Court justices argued that corporations are like *people*; and that they deserve the Constitutional protection of an actual citizen. [Sadly, 4 of those 5 jurists later argued that actual citizens who are gay or lesbian, *don't* deserve that same Constitutional protection of equal rights.] In that *Citizens United* decision, the “right” which the Court determined that a corporation has, is the right to freedom of speech. And what better way for a corporation to speak freely, than to purchase millions of dollars in political advertisement to back a candidate or issue that can help that corporation make more money?

As convoluted as the Court's thinking may be, concerning what constitutes a “person”, and the Constitutional guarantee of Free Speech, all nine judges did agree on this one basic premise: *Money Talks!* People [and those Life-like corporations] who have great wealth, can exert great influence. Big contributors to political campaigns do get the ear of important and powerful people. In politics, in business, in sports, in religion - in Life in general - money does talk! Now before all you millionaires get too chatty, or too comfortable with this notion, you need to realize that the way in which money talks, and what it actually says, is subject to interpretation. Two-thousand years ago, Jesus himself recognized how money can be an extremely effective communicator; however, Jesus also has a specific way of translating what that money may actually be saying.

As Jesus sits in the Jerusalem temple, watching the crowd put money into the treasury, he doesn't just look at the crowd or the money - he studies the people. Jesus has this amazing ability to truly see *people* - to interpret their behavior and to discern their genuine motives and character. When looking at others, he sees them as they really are - not their reputations, or culturally assigned roles, or their social or financial standing. Jesus perceives their authentic, inner soul. In that crowded area around the temple treasury, he observes how some people make their offering

discreetly, while others make sure their contribution is noticed by all. And among all these people, Jesus sees and recognizes *one* person whose giving is truly exceptional!

While many wealthy individuals are tossing-in their offerings with a flourish, Jesus notices one poor widow quietly putting in her two small coins. And when he sees this - as Jesus sees *her* - he says, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all who are contributing...for she has put in everything she has!" And here's an important thing for us to remember: that regardless of a person's wealth, or status, or social position, each of us is in the same position as that widow! We all have our needs and desires, our problems and passions, our joys and our concerns. Each of us has an on-going faith-journey, and a unique Life-story. And all of us - great or small, wealthy or poor - possess that special gift of our authentic *selves*, which only we can offer to the world. When you and I realize this, we may begin to better appreciate the true value of our lives, and the lives of others. And we may become more willing to invest ourselves in those enterprises which truly matter, just like that widow does.

Those two coins represent all that widow has in terms of financial resources. Yet in many ways, she is far richer than many of those around her; because she joyfully offers-up to God all that she has, and all that she is. She realizes that *with* those coins, or *without* them, her life depends upon Divine Compassion and Grace. Many well-to-do people [like most of us] don't always recognize this truth. Our money gives us options, independence, and at least a temporary sense of security. And the truth is, we generally like it that way! Therefore, you and I would be hard pressed to put our entire paycheck into an offering plate. [Though if some of you want to do that today, I say "Go for it!"]

Essentially, what it comes down to is this: What does our money *truly* mean to us? Is it our primary focus, our deepest motivator, our tightly held security-blanket, our ability to express ourselves socially, stylistically, or politically? Or is our money an instrument through which you and I express the true depth of our love for God and others? Do we depend on our money to give us what we want and need; or do we dare to depend on our Sacred Source to bless and enrich our lives? Jesus encourages us to be more like that widow - to live our lives and to use our resources in ways that show that we truly trust that our Divine Source will ultimately provide all that we truly need.

Like a modern-day Cleveland Cavalier, that old 1st Century widow declares that she is “All In!” So even as she drops the only semblance of independence she has into that temple treasury, she still holds firmly to her reliance upon the Holy One. Therefore, Jesus raises her up as a shining example - as one who has the marvelous ability to live by *faith* - as one who truly understands the Divine claim upon every portion of a person’s life - as one who demonstrates what it means to be a faithful steward.

Historically, Jesus’ followers are referred to as *stewards*; and what they do with the money, time and talents at their disposal, is called *stewardship*. Stewards manage the resources of others, they do not own them. Jesus teaches that the True Owner of all that exists, is that Divine Source from whom all things come. And any wealth or possessions that you or I hold, really aren’t ours in any permanent sense; they simply pass through our fingers, as you and I pass through Life. It’s kind of like buying a piece of property with a river running through it. You may take possession of the land, but you cannot own the river. [Yes, you could build a dam, but the water must eventually pass through, or that land become submerged!] That’s how it is with our money, our things, our time, our talents, our lives and our selves. They all come from God, belong to God, and return to God! And the propensity to try to hold any of them too tightly, can end up drowning us.

Perhaps this is why Jesus didn’t say that we are to love God with *all* our heart, *all* our soul, *all* our strength, *all* our mind, and maybe 10% of our money! Yet that’s the notion we buy-into when we try to calculate the minimal amount of money we make available for Divine purposes. And that’s where this story of the widow can enlighten and instruct you and me today.

This isn’t a story about a small gift; it’s about a tremendous treasure! It’s about getting the most good out of our lives and our resources, by joyfully offering them up for the greater good! It’s about a person who is willing to give all that she has - trusting that the Holy One who gave her everything, will ultimately take care of everything. While that may seem like a frightening position to be in, having that kind of faith can be the most freeing and fulfilling way a person can ever live. And a humble and faithful life like that speaks louder and clear than any corrupt corporation’s considerable campaign contributions ever could!