

Give It Your All!

[Text - Mark 12:38-44]

Pastor Dave Shackle

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As Jesus sits in the Jerusalem temple, watching the crowd putting money into the treasury, he doesn't just look at the crowd or the money - Jesus sees the people! His ability to truly *see* people, and to discern their true character and motivation, is absolutely remarkable. He sees people as they really are - not their assigned roles, or reputations, or social positions - but the genuine person within. And it's this marvelous power of observation that allows him to notice things that others can easily overlook.

In that busy, crowded area around the temple treasury, Jesus observes one individual whose giving is truly exceptional. While many wealthy individuals toss-in their contributions with a grand flourish, there is one poor widow quietly putting in her two small coins. And when Jesus sees this - as he 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!"

Jesus' example, of taking the time to actually *see* and acknowledge other people, can be extremely helpful for you and me today. Far too often, when we meet other people, we immediately forget their names. If they don't look or feel quite right, we tend to ignore them, or even quickly label and judge them. It's as though they're not important enough to receive our full focus and attention; especially those who appear different from us; those who live on the fringes of society; those with noticeable mental or physical impairments; those who are poor or even those who are poorly dressed. However, the more you and I actually get to know these individuals. and begin to understand their problems and pain, or their joys and their passions, the more we come to appreciate them as fellow human beings. And taking our time before forming a hasty opinion about others not only benefits them, but it's extremely helpful to you and me as well. It opens us up to recognize the Divine Presence worth in every person we encounter. And it helps us realize that, as members of the One Human Family, we all share similar struggles and afflictions, hopes and dreams, desires and needs.

Because of our personal problems and pain, joys and aspirations, concerns and struggles, each of us have a unique Life-story to tell. All of us possess the special gift of *ourselves*; a gift that only we can offer to the world. And when we realize this we often become more willing to share who we are, and what we have, with those around us. Those two small coins that the widow offers to the Holy One may well represent all that she has in terms of financial resources. Yet in many ways, this woman is far richer than most, because she can freely and joyfully offer-up all that she has and all that she is. She realizes that with those coins, or without them, her life depends on Divine Love and Grace. Comfortable, well-to-do people [like most of us] don't always recognize this. My money gives me independence, options, and a certain sense of security. And the truth is, I like it that way. Therefore, I would be hard pressed to put my entire paycheck into the offering plate. [Though if some of you are inclined to do so, blessings upon you!]

Basically it boils down to this: what do our possessions *truly* mean to us? Are they our primary focus, our tightly held security-blanket, our perceived source of power, prestige and independence? Or are they instruments through which you and I can serve the Holy One and others? Do we depend on our money to give us what we want and need in life, or do we dare depend upon our Divine Source to sustain and enrich us?

That poor widow may have tossed the only shred of independence she *had* into that temple treasury; however, in doing so, she held firmly to her trust and reliance on the Holy One. Therefore, Jesus raises her up as a shining example; as one who displays an extraordinary faith; as one who understands the Divine claim upon every aspect of our lives.

Historically, people of faith refer to themselves as *stewards*. Stewards aren't the owners, but rather the *managers* of the resources around them. This is why what we do with the money, time and talents that are ours to access, is called *stewardship*. The actual Owner, is our Creative Source of Life - the Holy One from whom all things derive. The molecular *stuff* that makes-up our money, our possessions, even our bodies, existed long before you or I ever did; and it will continue long after we're gone. At best, you and I "manage" it - we never fully own it. It's kind of like buying a piece of property with a river running through it. You can take possession of the land, but you cannot own the river; it simply passes through. Similarly, that's the way it is with our money, our things, our time, our talents, our lives and our selves!

So while our calculating minds may still want to ask, "How much are we *supposed* to give?" that's a flawed question - because that's an *owner's* question, not a steward's. And this is where the story of the widow enlightens and instructs us; because it's the story of a person who is willing to give *all that she has*, trusting that the Holy One who gave her everything in the first place, will ultimately take care of her. And while that might seem like an unsure or even frightening prospect, having that kind of faith is the most freeing and fulfilling way a person can ever live.