

***“A Tale of Two Coins”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost

Sunday, November 17, 2013

and updated for

Sunday, September 25, 2022

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**Holy Scriptures: Luke 21:1-4**

*The Widow’s Offering*

[Jesus] looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; <sup>2</sup> he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. <sup>3</sup> He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; <sup>4</sup> for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”

**Worship Theme:**

*Loving acts  
of sacrifice and commitment  
inspire and encourage  
the same.*

**Sermon:**

When Betty and I were students at Union Theological Seminary,  
lunches were served in the school refectory.

One day as we walked down the food line there was a large basket of oranges.  
Someone from the kitchen staff had posted a neat sign that read:

*“Fresh Florida Oranges!*

*Take one and only one.*

*Remember: Jesus is watching!”*

Well, further down the there was a large plate of warm chocolate chip cookies.

One of the seminarians had scribbled a note that said:

*“Take all the cookies you want.*

*Remember: Jesus is busy watching the oranges.”*

Let’s put in the energy together to reflect on a story in the Holy Bible  
about what happened the day Jesus stopped to watch people  
as they put their gifts in the temple treasury.

This is just as much a biblical story about a follower of God  
who made the time to invest her whole self,

to extend the effort to go all in.  
What we learn and glean here might very well surprise us, inspire us,  
change us, leave us flat, heave us forward, and make a world of difference.

Remember, Jesus is watching...

## **Two Coins**

The setting is Jerusalem.  
The time is Passover, the same week that Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected.

Luke 21 is a part of a biblical storytelling of the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry.  
Jesus and his followers have entered Jerusalem to great fanfare and celebration.

Some say it was a parade,  
a celebration of joy, for Christ has come!  
*God is alive and at work in the world!*

Some say it was a protest march,  
a proclamation that in Jesus we shall overcome and be set free.  
*God is alive and at work in the world!*

Some say it was a coronation march,  
for God has sent a new king, a prince of peace.  
*God is alive and at work in the world!*

Maybe it was all three...since God is alive and at work in the world.

In any case, ever since Jesus' faith community in Nazareth  
tried to throw him off a cliff for preaching an inclusive and liberating Gospel,  
Jesus Christ had been telling people to be quiet,  
to please not make too much noise about him being the Messiah.

You see, He had ministry and mission and miracles to do.

But those days were over.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem He took off the kid gloves and put on boxing gloves;  
He set aside the meek and mild approach and took a fighting stance for God.

We find him in Jerusalem setting himself  
over and against the religious practices of the time.

He reflects more about transformation than the temple;  
more about religious authenticity than false piety;  
more about mission than maintenance.

In the Gospel According to Luke,  
during the days between his entrance into Jerusalem  
and his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane,  
Jesus made it clear that not all who say, "Lord, Lord"  
are pleasing in the sight of God.

When the Pharisees order him to tell his people to be quiet,  
he says that if they stopped praising God the very stones would cry out. (19: 40)

When Jesus sees how the temple has become a place of business, a den of thieves,  
He overturns the tables and says, "My house shall be a house of prayer!" (19: 45)

When His authority to teach and heal is questioned by the religious leaders,  
He tells a parable about wicked tenants who disobeyed their Master. (20: 9-18)

When the spies of the scribes and Pharisees sought to trick him with a coin,  
He tells them to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,  
and to God the things that are God's." (20: 25)

When the Sadducees attempt to trip him up with a question about marriage after death,  
He takes the conversation to a higher plane,  
pointing listeners to a God "of the living, for all live to him." (20: 38)

Jesus warns his followers to beware of religious leaders  
"who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers." (Luke 20:47)

He points out that the ones who were called to protect widows were exploiting them,  
taking advantage of the most vulnerable people in the community.

Finally, fed up with all their divisive actions and shenanigans  
and distractions from what is truly important,  
Jesus set himself down in the temple  
and watched as tithes were placed in the treasury.

*[Jesus] looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury;  
he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins.  
He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them;  
for all of them have contributed out of their abundance,  
but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on."* (20: 1-4)

## **Two Coins**

She placed two coins into the temple treasury;  
two coins which Jesus tells us were her last two coins.

Why do you think she did that?

Did the widow know that Jesus, the Son of God, was watching?

Did she know that at that moment he was lavishing praise on her, on her faithfulness?

Did it matter?

What do you think mattered most to her?

The Gospel of Mark specifies that two *mites* (Greek *lepta*) are together worth a [quadrans](#), the smallest Roman coin. A *lepton* was the smallest and least valuable coin in circulation in [Palestine](#), worth about six minutes of an average daily wage. Well, that is what the scholars at Wikipedia say. I, on the other hand, prefer to imagine that one coin represented sacrifice; the other commitment.

Sacrifice and commitment unite to form the foundation of a life of faithfulness, grace, and love, of building and sustaining community, Think about the relationships which matter the most to you. Personally, I can draw instantly upon the feelings that flooded my soul in life-changing moments: when I was married, when I saw my son and daughter for the first time, when I realized how much God loved me.

Sacrifice and commitment, two words as small as tiny coins yet filled with so much meaning and worth.

What would you do for love? You would sacrifice anything to help if asked, if needed, if that is what it required. Your commitment would take precedence over anything else. This is what God feels and thinks about you. This is what God invites, compels, calls, loves us into, a relationship built on a solid foundation of sacrifice and commitment.

## Two Coins

Money matters. Contrary to popular opinion and the film *Cabaret*, money does not make the world go around. Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis said, "*I don't care for money much, but it does quiet my nerves.*" Money matters. How, when, and why we practice faithful stewardship makes a world of difference.

Did you see the cartoon on the Widow's Mite? It shows a woman in church as offering is being received, and reads: "*Due to a misunderstanding, the Widow Harris put termites in the offering plate.*"

While some gave out of their abundance  
a portion of their treasury, their talents, their time,  
she dedicated all.

She gave all, and that made all the difference.  
She sacrificed and committed her whole self.

Gratefully  
Joyfully  
Humbly  
Generously  
Unconditionally

What Jesus pointed out as he witnessed her gift to the treasury  
is that what truly matters is what's in our hearts.

The widow's two coins contributed to the cause of the temple  
as blessed gifts to the treasury.

They were a very welcome addition  
to the sum of feeding and sustaining the overall ministry.

Her gift of all she had, meaning that she was "all in" when it comes to God,  
contributed to the cause of changing hearts and minds and lives.

The late comedian Flip Wilson told about going to a church where,  
after the sermon,  
the offering plate shot around the room and came back empty.

Preacher sent it back around, and again it came back empty.

Preacher said, *"This church has got to get up and crawl."*

*"Make it crawl, Rev!"* shouted the congregation.

*"After this church crawls, it has to get up and walk!"*

*"Make it walk, Rev!"*

*"After this church walks, it has to get up and run!"*

*"Make it run, Rev!"*

*"For this church to run, it's going to take money!"*

*"Let it crawl, Rev, let it crawl!"*

My father, the Rev. George E. Calvert,  
taught me and our home congregation,  
the Church of the Living Hope,  
to give the first 2 hours of work each week to God.

Try it, and see if your attitude at work  
and productivity and collegial relationships don't improve.  
Give the first tithe of your time and effort in a relationship to God,  
and see how that impacts your friendship.

Tithe your first thoughts of a new day,  
and see if your daylight hours aren't brighter.  
Dedicate the first hourly wages you earn to God,  
and see if the Lord doesn't provide you and yours  
with an abundance of grace and resources.

### **Two Coins**

Remember, Jesus was watching...

Jesus watched, and learned, and was moved...deeply moved.  
He was inspired.  
He felt empowered.  
He took away from that moment a greater sense of courage.  
If she could sacrifice all for God,  
if she could be so committed to God,  
if she could give her all,  
then He could, too.

There is no coincidence here.  
Her sacrifice and commitment touched the soul of Jesus of Nazareth,  
and that has made a world of difference.

Jesus got up from the seat in the temple and made preparations for dinner.

He moved toward His Last Supper with His friends.

He shared with all who would partake  
the Bread and the Cup,  
blessed emblems of His sacrifice and commitment,  
two words as small as tiny coins  
yet filled with so much meaning and worth.

### **Two Coins**

Why do we make the assumption that bigger is better?  
See what God can do with 12 tribes of Israel? 12 disciples? A handful of apostles?

See what God can do with a family-sized church,  
blessed by a few families from all walks of life and love  
who put their whole selves into what we believe and love and affirm?

Anthropologist Margaret Mead spoke a universal truth when she said:

*"Never doubt that a small group  
of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world;*

*indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

## **Two Coins**

A Christian was driving his family home on the Long Island Expressway.  
The line of cars at the tollbooth seemed to go on forever.  
When he finally pulled the car alongside the tollbooth,  
    he threw his two coins in disgust toward the basket.  
For whatever reason – bad aim, too much force, whatever – they clanged off the rim.  
He could hear them roll around under the car.

Totally frustrated,  
    he ignored the red light and sped off down the highway.  
Within seconds  
    he saw the flash of blue lights in his rearview mirror.  
He pulled over.

As soon as the state trooper approached the vehicle he launched into a loud tirade  
    against the tollbooth, the lousy traffic, the unnecessary tolls.  
The State Trooper did not say a word.  
He turned around and walked all the way back to the tollbooth.  
He pulled two coins out of his pocket.  
He placed them in the basket.  
He walked back to the car.  
He looked the driver in the eyes and said,  
    *"Remember that that is the second time  
        someone sacrificed Himself for you."*

Remember, Jesus is watching...

How is God calling you  
    to live out and give out  
        your two coins,  
            your divine capacity for sacrifice and commitment?

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*