

Sunday Sermon
November 11, 2018
Mark 12:41-44
“Contribution or Commitment”

Introduction

There is an old story about a farmer who decided one morning that he would have eggs and bacon for breakfast. He went out to his barn and told his hen, “I would like to have eggs for breakfast.” The hen clucked and produced two beautiful eggs.

Then the farmer went over to his hog, and he said, “And I would like to have bacon to go with my eggs.” The hog said, “I am not sure I want you to have bacon.”

The hen who was listening to this exchange began to scold the hog, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I gave my eggs to the farmer. You should give bacon to him. After all, he feeds us, gives us shelter, and takes care of us.” The hog replied, “Yes, but from you he only asked a contribution. From me, he wanted a commitment.”

I

Jesus is at the Temple in Jerusalem, and he sits down opposite the treasury and watches people crowd putting in money as their offering. The money was tossed into a metal container that had a trumpet-shaped opening.

Keep in mind there was no paper money then, no checks, no debit cards, only coins. Bigger coins were worth more money, so the more big coins you put into the container, the more noise you made. It was quite an arena for those who liked to toot their own horns.

From where he was sitting, Jesus saw a woman, a widow, walk up to the container in the Court of Women, and let two little copper coins fall into the treasury. They made such a small sound that only she could hear it.

They were called lepta, the coins the widow had, and each was worth one sixty-fourth of a denarius. A denarius was the equivalent of a day’s wage, so lepta were the coins of the smallest value in Roman currency of the day. The text says there were worth a penny.

That is all the widow had. Yet, she did an extravagant thing. She gave it all. And to the disciples nearby, who had been arguing among themselves about who would be the greatest, Jesus said, “This woman has done more than all others combined.”

II

Now, why are we using a story about a woman who gave the equivalent of a penny when the church needs you to commit thousands of dollars? Because in giving attitude come first, then amount; and from there we move from contribution to

commitment.

This story mirrors the commitment that Jesus is about to make. Because it comes during the week we call Passion Week or Holy Week, when Jesus is about to give the greatest commitment, his life for our sake.

Years ago, the church where my husband pastored was running a shortfall in giving toward expenses. The chair of their Finance Committee, Bill Uzzell, calculated what it would take to meet expenses for the year and meet all the mission pledges. He figured out that if every giving unit would give just \$100 more than they had pledged to give, the church would have enough to get through and finish all their commitments for the year.

It was October. So there were three months left in the year, so about \$33.00 a month per giving unit was needed. The chair said, "That means if you just leave off going out to eat at a moderately priced restaurant once a month, you can do this. This is not a big sacrifice," he said.

Later that week my husband was visiting Nona Beamguard. He sat with Nona on the porch of the simple house where she lived alone, having been widowed for several years.

Nona said, "Bill Uzzell wants us to give \$100 before the end of the year. \$100 is a lot of money." My husband said he thought, "No it is not. \$100 is not a large amount. What is this woman talking about?"

Nona said, "You know, I do not talk a lot about this, but I worked in a mill all my life, and I do not have any retirement. I get \$565 a month from Social Security, and I try to tithe. \$100 is a lot of money for me, but I have figured out a way that I can pay it."

She said, "My paper bill is coming due, and I usually pay it by the quarter, that is \$40. I also have two magazine subscriptions that I have been trying to decide whether to renew. I figure I can give up those two subscriptions. My neighbor said she would give me her paper when she finishes reading it, and I am sure I can borrow magazines from others.

That will make up about eighty dollars, and I can squeeze out the other twenty somewhere. So I am going to give what Bill Uzzell asked us to give."

My husband said he left that widow's house thinking, "Neely, you have no idea. You have no clue what making a sacrifice for the work of the Lord means."

III

Today we honor veterans. If anyone knows the difference between making a contribution and making a sacrificial commitment, it is a veteran.

One year on the Sunday of Veterans Day weekend, my husband decided to have all of the Veterans in worship come forward for the children's time so that he could interview them about their service.

Most of the veterans shared briefly about in what branch they served and when and where. But one man, who had been a Merchant Marine in World War II and had

received Veterans status late, in 1988, talked on and on about all he had done in the war, all the battles in which he fought.

Finally, the turn came to Bob Jackson. My husband knew Bob's story from his family that he had been in the worst of the fighting in WWII. He was in one of the first waves in the Normandy Landing on D Day. He landed at Omaha Beach. Then later he had been dropped behind German lines to fight in the Battle of the Bulge. Bob could easily not have come back from the war. He could certainly not have survived.

Yet Bob did not say a word about what he did in the war. Instead he said to the children, "Boys and girls, we should not glorify war. In war people die. Instead, we should find ways to make the world a more peaceful place, so that no one ever has to go and die."

After the service, Bob said to my husband, "I am not a hero. And anyone who has to tell you about all he did is not a hero. The only heroes are the ones lying under the white crosses. The rest of us got to come home and have families and see our grandchildren. For most of us, what we gave amounts to only a small percentage of our lives. But for those under the white crosses, they gave it all.

Conclusion

Next Sunday is Consecration Sunday. At the end of the service we will have a special time of communion that will include the making of financial pledges for 2019. But Consecration Sunday is about more than promising financial contributions. It is about the commitment of our entire selves. "The truth is," Jesus said, "that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they will never miss; she gave extravagantly, sacrificially; she gave her all."

As you prepare for Consecration Sunday, think about this: When it came to his saving act of grace for us, Jesus did not choose simply to make a contribution. He made a commitment, a sacrificial commitment. He gave all for us. May we respond with the commitments of our lives. Amen.