

We just listened to the well-known recounting of the widow's mite. Jesus has seated himself across from the treasury after a long day of answering people's questions.

What were these questions, you ask?

The first question was about whether one should pay taxes.

The answer: pay to Caesar what belongs to him and to God what belongs to God.

The second question was about marriage and property. You know the one: a man was married to a woman and he died, then the brother married her and he died. And on and on. Whose woman would she be in the afterlife?

The answer: none of the above. Jesus states that the men asking the question clearly do not understand either marriage or the resurrected life.

And the third question? What is most important commandment?

Answer: well—I'm pretty sure everyone here knows it. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus has spent the day talking to people about money, property and God. So, taking his cue from them, he begins to speak:

“Watch out”—Jesus says—“for those religious people who flaunt their nice clothes and act pious—who like to be known as people of God, who say long prayers so people will notice and praise their faith. Watch them—because these sanctimonious people wouldn't hesitate to call in the loan on a poor person's house.”

Then Jesus sits himself down by the treasury. People are putting money into a large receptacle which probably looks somewhat like a large, iron, cauldron-type thing. And they're not paying with checks or paper money.

The rich people approach the treasury pot with their moneybags jingling. Then they pour it into the treasury. Makes a pleasing sound, yes?

The poor widow approaches. Hers doesn't jingle much. And it hardly makes a sound.

Except to Jesus. He smiles. He sees her heart. He knows why she gives. And why does she give?

Why does anyone give? Ask a good Baptist sometime why they give. There's only one answer to all questions for a good Baptist. Why do they do — *or not do*—things? Because it's in the bible. They do it because they are *supposed to*. God tells them to do it. In the bible.

But this widow isn't Baptist.

Why do WE give? Some give to make sure they are supporting the ongoing function of the church: services, education, fun fellowship things, emotional & spiritual support. We give because we get something from our giving. That's called transactional Christianity, and that's why some give.

That really shouldn't surprise anyone, because transactional giving is how the world works.

- We support the American Cancer Society so we can find a cure.
- We support the YMCA so we can have a place to work out.
- We support the American legion because.... well, I don't know exactly what they do, but I like the people in it—so I buy their Christmas trees!

In other words—we give to what we like and what we support, right?

But why did the widow give? She wasn't getting anything out of it. The religious establishment of the time didn't serve as a social service organization like the church often does now. She wasn't getting anything back from her offering. Why give?

From the beginning, God has asked us to give our first 10% out of everything we have. In the early days people gave 10% of their crops, or animals, or livelihood—even money if they were rich enough to have it.

And why did God ask for that first 10% of what we have? After all-- God—unlike the church, unlike the Legion, unlike the Y and the Cancer Society—doesn't need our 10%. Our food, our things, our money-- doesn't support God.

So, if we don't give because God needs it ---why do we give it?

We give because God knows we need it. We need to do this because we have no trouble *acquiring*. We love acquiring so much in fact, that some have amassed more than they can ever spend in one lifetime.

What WE need is to learn how to *release* some of what we have been given. God obviously thinks it's important that we learn that skill.

Why? I'm not sure. But God thought it was something important enough to instill into the Hebrews from the beginning, and important enough so that the earliest Christians built the church on communal living. A gift of the Spirit is learning to give.

So in the course of my adult life, I've gone from a scarcity mentality—trying to give just a little because there were so many bills, to trying to give just a little bit more each year. And then a just little bit more. Oddly, I think it seems to be helping me learn that I certainly don't need every thing I want, and that there really is more money available in our household than I thought. Who knew that would happen?

We may not be as poor as the widow, or as wealthy as the rich man, but our ability to give is universal.

Studies have shown that the people with the least money are the most generous. Many people questioned those results. So several years ago a man did a test, and filmed it with a hidden camera—I'm sure some of you have seen this video. A man gave a large pizza to a homeless gentleman. What happened next surprised him—and surprised about a million viewers (including me). The homeless man waited until the man left, and then quietly, secretly, took the pizza around to the other homeless people near him, eventually only taking only a half piece for himself.

He gave without a thought about what he would get back for his gift—after all the other homeless people couldn't return the generosity. This homeless man, and the poor widow can teach us so much. Giving is all about what it teaches us.

What do we give out of our abundance  
Pentecost 24

The Rev. Canon Lisa Fry  
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Because sometimes out of our abundance we give out of our poverty. But they have showed us that out of their poverty, they gave in abundance. Amen.