

SECOND READING: Luke 21:1-4

pg 85 NT

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; ² he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³ He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; ⁴ 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.”

This is the word of the Lord.

FIRST READING: 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 pg 183 NT

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹ As it is written,
“He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

This is the word of the Lord.

“One Heart, One Soul, One Gift Pt 2”

Today we continue in our stewardship emphasis. I suspect I know the reaction this stirs up in some of you. *Probably it's like the little boy who was fidgeting in church one Sunday. Finally, he leaned over to his mother and asked, “Mom, if we just give the money now, do you think he'll let us go?”*¹ Weellll, no. Christian stewardship is not about squeezing a few more dollars out of sometimes reluctant church members. Nor is it about paying dues or even supporting the church budget, although that is important. The true meaning of stewardship is something else.

Let's consider today one of the most well-known examples of faithful stewardship in the Gospels, the account of the poor widow who gave her last two cents to the Temple treasury. Her sacrifice was complete. She gave so much of herself that Jesus called his disciples over to see it. He compared her actions to what the Scribes were doing. He said, *“The 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.”*

Now, context is always important. Just prior to this, Jesus had said, “beware the scribes” who “devour widows' houses. The scribes, you see, were scholars who studied the Law, meticulously transcribed it, and wrote commentaries on it. They also wrote many other lesser laws. However, somewhere along the way, they'd lost track of the Law's intent. They'd forgotten that having compassion on the poor, on the widows, orphans and aliens in the land, is foundational to God's commands. Jesus certainly wanted to teach the disciples a few things: that is, to contemplate the disparity between the Scribes' abundance and the widow's poverty, the meaningless of the different sizes of their offerings, and certainly the difference between their motivations to give.

But you know, I am convinced that there is more here. You see, not only had Jesus warned the disciples about the scribes, just following this text, he predicted the destruction of the Temple, due to the faithlessness of God's people. So, I believe that Jesus was also teaching the

¹ Arthur Sundstrom. Sermon: *Resources at the Ready*” In: William Carter, ed. *“Speaking of Stewardship.”* (Louisville: Geneva Press; 1998); 18.

disciples that the Kingdom of God is not like this. It is not where people with abundance expect the poor to bear burdens which trap them in destitution,² where there is cruelty and lies, and callousness and oppression, where the powers of evil rule the day. The Kingdom is where people look for the Light no matter what darkness surrounds them, and respond by doing good, by showing kindness, beauty, compassion, tenderness, and grace and generosity. It's where people love because they know God first loved them (*pause*).

This revelation about a deeper meaning to the story got me thinking. It got me thinking about MY stewardship, about how it is that Mike and I together respond to God's love for us. And the answer is that we give to the Church...to FPC-CC, in particular. I think we do this in part because the Bible tells us so.³ It does. In the OT and NT, an amount is suggested in fact...10%, a tithe. Mike and I initially set a tithe as a goal and we now look at it as a minimum. Not always have we been true to this, but it's been our intent. We've also tried to write our check at the beginning of the month so that we don't get into the mindset that we give to God from what's left over. We give off the top. Somebody told us this once, and it made sense. We don't keep track, but we give as much time and talent as we can too. However, I need to admit that "following rules" has never ever been the motivator for Mike and I to do anything. So, we also give for other reasons too.

One is, we give because we love our Lord. We do. But to tell you the truth, Jesus wants more than our money.⁴ He wants our lives. He wants our hearts. He wants our souls. He wants us to be with him as he is with us forever, and to do his work in the world.... to pick up our crosses, feed his sheep, love our enemies, walk the extra mile, welcome strangers, work for peace. He wants our all. So...our tithing of money, in particular, is really such a small part. Mike and I give yet for other reasons too.

A week or so ago, the two of us visited Mary Trower in the hospital. For those of you may not know her, Mary is one of the beloved matriarchs of the Church. There are a number. In

² David Lose. In: Daily Bread. Luke 21:1-4. <http://www.davidlose.net/2013/12/luke-21-1-4/> (accessed 11-8-17).

³ Jill Duffield, "The Presbyterian Outlook" <http://pres-outlook.org/2017/11/why-i-give-to-the-church/> (accessed 11;9;17)

⁴ Jill Duffield.

fact, she is one of the charter members. In our conversation, not surprisingly, she asked how the Church was doing. I said, we were doing well. After a while, I just asked her what she loved most about FPC. She said, without a bit of hesitation, not a bit, that she “loved the church because of the people, and how they care for each other”. (repeat)

The other and main reason why Mike and I give to FPC-CC is because here we see the Kingdom work is being done. And we know that where the kingdom is, so is the King. In essence, Mike and I recognize this congregation to respond imperfectly, but yet to respond to God’s goodness by giving of themselves in the care of others, especially those who are in need. And it is done not reluctantly, but cheerfully.

This year FPC is on track to give 7-8% of its income to mission! And the Session has set a goal of continuing to increase it. This, of course, does not include the physical donations of food, clothing, toys, supplies for backpacks, hygiene kits and snack packs, which are donated to agencies like Cove House, Cove Soup kitchen, PDA, and PCHAS. In this church, all four offerings of the PCUSA are well supported. And by giving to these, FPC helps in providing relief to the victims of natural and unnatural disasters, food and shelter to the poor, and empowerment to the oppressed and weary. The needs of at-risk children and youth are addressed, and Christian witness is shared in cultures of violence and persecution. Church workers and future leaders at racial ethnic schools are aided through this giving. At FPC, mission co-workers in Zambia are tangibly supported as are local veterans’ groups and a child rescue organization. Stoney Brook Assisted Living center is led in a worship service monthly by an FPC-CC team, and many who come to our door with special needs are given food, money for gas or shelter, and prayer. Children are valued, guided and nurtured here and every member is offered prayer and a listening ear through a shepherding program.

Mike and I see brothers and sisters in Christ doing good here, doing Kingdom work. And we see it especially when hard times set in, when people are inadequate to stand against the brokenness and darkness of the world alone, when the evil powers threaten to undo us, and hatred, violence and cruelty overwhelm us. How close the evil powers have swirled around us

this week. How we have stood in disbelief and then felt our hearts literally break. But when the Herods and Pilates and the Roman crosses in OUR world threaten to kill us, time and time again, Mike and I have witnessed the people of FPC-CC open doorways to the goodness, love, kindness, and justice that is equally and ever present. They let the Light in...and it shines! Oh, how it shines in the darkness. They affirm for each other the promise that is ours, that evil will not win, that since that first Easter morning, it is doomed. Through maybe simply the giving of a hug, or the offering of a broad shoulder to cry on, or the early morning phone call or the writing of a card, members tap into the LOVE in our midst,⁵ and then life, grace and kindness is claimed. Together...with one heart and one soul, they respond.

Jesus said that *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* Well, you know, there is corollary to that truth. It is *“Where your HEART is, your TREASURE will be also”*.⁶ The people of FPC-CC have a heart to help others and their money, time and talent follow. I think this is why Mike and I cannot help but give our first fruits here, to this, God’s church... *“Where our heart is, our treasure is also.”*

And we want this church continue to, as Mary T said, to “take care of each other” for a long time to come. We want it to be here for our grandchildren and great grandchildren and great great grandchildren, or at least for yours. We want them to be welcomed and learn to be welcoming, to be visited when they are sick and to learn to visit others. We want them to be valued and learn to value others. We want them to worship and to bring others to worship. In essence, we want them to know that God has first loved them and that they can respond to God’s goodness by loving others, especially those who are in need, to do God’s ministry and mission in the world. This then is the meaning of stewardship.... *“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”* May it be so. Amen.

⁵Lewie Donalson. Sermon: “Sermon”. Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Chapel service. Nov 7, 2017.

⁶Jill Duffield.