

Contribution  
Rev. Nicole Farley  
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
November 11, 2012

**Hebrews 9:24-28**

<sup>24</sup>For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. <sup>25</sup>Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; <sup>26</sup>for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. <sup>27</sup>And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, <sup>28</sup>so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

**Mark 12:38-44**

38 As he taught, he said, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, <sup>39</sup>and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! <sup>40</sup>They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.’

41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup>A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. <sup>43</sup>Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. <sup>44</sup>For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’

What do you feel when you hear the story of the poor widow giving all she had? Perhaps guilt? Perhaps despair at not feeling able to do the same? Do you think of sacrifice? Does that mean giving everything at the expense of yourself? I suggest maybe there is another way to feel and another way to understand. We’ve heard the story before – the rich people give some and hardly flinch but the poor widow gives all she has. I don’t believe this account is an indictment against those with money. I don’t really think it’s about money at all.

Last week in the Adult Education class, where we were talking about the Holy Spirit, we managed to talk about individually feeling guilty for not being more active in working toward social justice. Here’s the thing – we all have different gifts, which manifest in different passions and different interests and different issues close to our hearts and different abilities. We know we have each been created uniquely and we know that the Holy Spirit has showered us with our own combination of gifts. Forcing ourselves to be passionate about something that does not come naturally is, frankly, a misuse of our gifts. That’s not what God intended. You’ve likely heard the phrase, “Be the best you you can be.” Restated, use *your* gifts to the fullest.

You’ve also, no doubt, heard the phrase “God loves a cheerful giver,” and very likely it was from

this very place. Giving should not be a chore or something that is done after much internal struggle until you can finally slap a smile on while you do it. Also, though, it shouldn't be easy, without thought as it was for the scribes. We read that "all of them contributed out of their abundance." They hardly noticed, they hardly felt it, they hardly experienced giving. The giving I am talking about is the giving like that of the widow and like that of Jesus. They each had something that mattered to them that they gave to God instead of keeping for themselves.

The widow gives her wealth – remember what I said about Naomi last Sunday – being a widow meant you had no way to provide for yourself – however the woman in our story came by her two coins, it could not have been easy, thus increasing their value even beyond their monetary value. Jesus gave his life, and we read it was once for all. We think about how much our own lives matter to us, of the people who surround us and for whom we care and what we will leave when it's our time and we realize that Jesus had a life like ours, too, with people he loved and work to be done. And still he offered himself "once to bear the sins of many."

What is it that you love, about which you are passionate, which you do with gladness for yourself? Whatever it is, it can be done for God. Sacrifice has come to be understood as giving something up but the roots of the word actually mean "to make or do" "sacred or holy." Is it reading you enjoy? Set aside time each day to do sacred reading. It doesn't have to be the Bible, although I'd certainly recommend at least some time reading the Bible each day. There are thousands of writings which point to God, which lift up God's creation, which open us to God's presence.

Is it wood-working you love to do? Maybe you find a charitable organization, a group doing God's work, who needs your skills. Or maybe you give thanks for each piece of wood as you handle it, noticing the uniqueness of each, marveling at the tree God created which you hold now in your hands. Maybe it's gardening you love. There are many ways in which you could contribute some of the bounty of your garden to those who might not otherwise have fresh produce available. There's even a specific Presbyterian ministry called just.good.food. whose aim is to create gardens for giving. Just because we don't have the space here at the church to grow a garden for this purpose doesn't mean you can't do your own.

And maybe the thing you love is working with numbers. Working with a church budget to find the best way to put the most money into the mission budget is certainly sacred work. So is doing volunteer CPA work for a charitable organization or for a neighbor who can't afford help on taxes. How you use your gifts for God is only as limited as your imagination. When you use your gifts this way, doing something you enjoy, it's easy to imagine being a cheerful giver.

We don't all have a fire in our hearts for protesting or letter-writing or even serving meals. But

some of us do. As the author says so eloquently in the letter to the Ephesians, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> This list is merely a sampling of different gifts – if yours is not listed, it does not mean that it is of less value or importance. God created you in God’s image; that makes whatever you have important to God, exactly as you are.

Of course, just because you don’t have a passion for something today doesn’t mean you might not tomorrow. The Holy Spirit doesn’t sprinkle gifts upon us at birth and then walk, or float, away. Our gifts are always developing and changing, through the course of our lives. Just because you don’t think you would like serving meals, if you’ve never tried it, you can’t know for certain. And many of you realize that, with age, we aren’t able to do the things we once could. It may seem like some gifts are lost with the loss of our abilities but, again, the Holy Spirit still does not leave. New gifts await discovery, await revelation. Even without language, without words, we can convey kindness, we can convey peace, we can convey joy.

So we come back to the poor widow. “She out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” Humorist and writer Erma Bombeck has been quoted as saying quite seriously, “When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, ‘I used everything you gave me.’”<sup>2</sup> That’s it. That’s what it’s about – everything that matters to us, everything we pride ourselves on, everything we cherish, every gift we’ve been given is given back to God conscientiously and purposefully. So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: God, we are yours. We acknowledge that all we have comes from you. Accept back to you what we offer, freely and cheerfully. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:11-13

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/e/ermabombec106409.html>