

Sermon Title: "On Giving God Our All"

Biblical Passage: Mark 12:38-44

Passage Background and Summary

The scripture passage for today begins with Jesus denouncing the scribes. They focus on their appearance and markers of success and respect, and they take from the poor and the widows. Jesus says, "They will receive the greater condemnation." As Jesus continues walking through Jerusalem, he sits down across from the treasury and watches as people put in money. The wealthy people put in a lot of money, yet a poor widow comes along and puts in "two small copper coins, which are worth a penny." Of her gift Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." Jesus appears to celebrate the widow for her gift.

Sermon Points

Jesus of Nazareth has arrived in the great city of Jerusalem, where the Temple is located and the center of religion and power. As Jesus makes his way through one side of the city, from the underside, the emperor comes from the other side. Thus, the stage is set for a confrontation; Jesus has come to confront those with religious and political power. Jesus asks those in the Lord's house: Whose side are you on? Are you on the side of the oppressed and marginalized because that's where God is? With his arrival and message, the church is being challenged and the politicians are being pushed. The first thing Jesus does is go into the Temple and stage a protest. He chases out the money changers because they have taken the good systems and corrupted it. The preachers are taking the money for themselves; they're the prosperity preachers and Jesus exposes them. While in the Temple, they try to catch Jesus in a conversation about taxes to which he says give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. That's what stewardship season is about.

The widow lives in a time and place where there is no social safety net, and she depends on others. She doesn't have anything, and she knows what it's like to struggle and live life on the margins. Jesus sees her and is amazed by her generosity. She gives just a little, but for her it is her all. How could Jesus approve of that? He had just finished condemning the powerful who exploit the poor. The response is that Jesus actually sees her. No one noticed the poor widow giving, but Jesus does. There is a God who sees us in our suffering. Jesus sees that she is the embodiment of the lesson that he is trying to teach. She knew better than them that the worldly systems and the church that had become worldly had already failed her, so she was not invested in that. She was rooted in something larger. We can put our hands in the hand of one who is larger than any church or any system. She wasn't tied to consumerism and consumption. She was free. In giving God all that she had to live on, she gave God her life. Give God your life and your money will follow.

Jesus is amazed at her generosity but angered by the greed of those who have and continue to take but not give. Those who have more ought to give more. In the nation and in the church, to whom much is given, much is required. The wealthy ought to pay more taxes, and we ought to tithe according to our income.

Lastly, Jesus is activated by God. Jesus was inspired by her because she reminded him of his assignment. His assignment required that he give his all. Like Jesus and the widow, we must also give our all. When we give our all, God will give to us abundantly. God gives us peace, joy, confidence, and more.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it mean to be on the side of the oppressed and marginalized? What does that look like in-person?
2. What, if any habits, practices, or customs within the contemporary church that need to come to an end?
3. What are prosperity preachers? How do they relate to today's sermon?
4. Pastor Warnock says that Jesus is angered by the greed of those in the Temple. What else angered Jesus as it relates to economic systems and wealth?
5. How can we use our finances to care for our neighbors within our church and community?
6. What do you need to give to God?
7. Do you have any testimonies of a time you gave God your all and God gave to you?