



*The Biggest Gift*  
*Mark 12:38-44*

*Armistice/Veterans Day: 100th Anniversary of the End of World War 1*  
*Sunday, November 11th, 2018*  
*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*  
*The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

Text: And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. (v. 43)

In 1921 the graves of four unknown soldiers were exhumed from four different cemeteries in France. U.S. Army Sgt. Edward F. Younger, who was wounded in combat and received the Distinguished Service Medal, was chosen to select a soldier for burial at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington. After the four identical caskets were lined up for his inspection, Younger chose the third casket from the left by placing a spray of white roses on it. The chosen soldier was transported to the U.S. on the USS Olympia. The other three were reburied at Meuse Argonne American Cemetery in France. The inscription on the tomb reads:

"Here Rests in Honored Glory an American Soldier Known But To God."

The gospels are driven largely by people whose names are “known but to God”; the magi from the East who worshiped and brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh; the child who shared the fish and barley loaves that Jesus used to feed the 5000, the woman who fell to her knees and poured costly nard upon Jesus’ feet, and the widow who dropped her two small coins into the offering box.

What, you may ask, do these characters have in common? One thing--Extravagant Generosity.

Recall the scene in our gospel lesson. Jesus is in Jerusalem. He had just been asked what is the greatest commandment to which he replied, “To love the Lord your God with all of your heart, your mind, and your soul. There is a second commandment connected to it, namely, to love your neighbor as yourself. Upon these two commandments all of the other commandments rest.” (vss. 30-31)

Jesus then sat down opposite the Temple treasury and watched as worshipers put in their offering. Almost everyone put in an exact amount based on the law of the tithe and how it was to be calculated. But her offering was different. The amount of her offering was not great. It was the two smallest of coins. By law she could have kept of the coins, but she did not. Seeing what she had done Jesus called the disciples to him. “Do you see that woman over there? Did you just see what she did? Everyone else contributed out of their abundance, carefully calculated. But she was different. She gave all that she had. I tell you, her offering was greater than everyone else’s combined!”

The disciples didn't understand. Nor do we. Her offering would not make a difference to the operating budget of the Temple. Nor would it buy more candles or animals for sacrifice. No, her offering was not great by the standards of the world but it was extravagantly generous by the standards of the heart.

You see, while everyone else gave out of their abundance, she gave out of her poverty. Now, it must be understood that Jesus never advocated poverty. There is no virtue in poverty. But those who gave out of their abundance had plenty left over. They could still live in big houses, wear fine clothes, and take luxury vacations, if they were so inclined. They didn't really have to give up anything. They did not have to sacrifice their wants and their wishes. They still had more than enough.

But she, well, Jesus knew that as soon as he heard her coins drop into the coffer that she would feel its effect for a long, long time. Because of her offering she would have to do some reprioritizing. She would have to do without some things, some comforts, some luxuries.

In her heart of hearts, though, she knew that she did the right thing. She knew that her offering that day so long ago reflected her commitment to her God. Her offering was emblematic of her love. We love God because God first loved us, John's first letter reads. (1 John 4:19) Her offering, small by the world's standards, was a response to that great magnificent Divine Holy Love that would never let her go--EVER.

The reason Jesus called her gift the "biggest gift" was because it made a bigger difference not in the life of the Temple, but in her life. It was an indication of the sincerity of her commitment to the work of God's Kingdom.

To God be the glory. Amen. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> While I "grazed widely" keen insight was given to me by Margrey deVega (*A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series: Thematic Plans for Years A, B, C*, compiled by Jessica Miller Kelley, c.2016, pp. 161-2) and Lamar Williamson, Jr. (*Interpretation: Mark*, c. 1983, p 234)