

November 9, 2025

Luke 21:1-4

“With Grateful Hearts We Give!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This morning is our first Stewardship Sunday where we talk about Christ's love for us at the cross and our response as believers in Jesus. I would like to begin with a question: How or why do you give your time and goods to the Lord? Notice that I didn't say: How much do you give to the Lord and why don't you give more? It's this second question that might be expected from a preacher especially since prices keep going up and there are expenses to be paid at the church and lots of things that need to be done. But the real issue is motivation - what's in the heart? Paul writes: "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Indeed! **With Grateful Hearts We Give!**

Of course there's a bit of danger in me saying it like that. Let's face it. Our sinful flesh is not so cheerful or grateful when it comes to giving our time and money to church. In fact, some might very well use the words of Paul, "not reluctantly or under compulsion" as a fantastic excuse to never give again. After all, is there ever really a moment when we can be perfectly cheerful and thankful when we give to the Lord, while thinking about all the other things for which we could be using our money and other resources? Please allow me to tell you what I understand is a true story to help you see the point of our gospel lesson, which is the account of the widow's offering of everything she had.

Two well-to-do Christians, a lawyer and a businessman, joined a tour that was going around the world. In Korea one day, they saw a field by the side of the road. In the field, a strong boy was pulling a very crude plow, while an old man held the plow handles and directed it through the rice paddy. The lawyer was amused and took a picture of the scene. "That's a curious sight," he said to the missionary, who was the interpreter and guide. "Yes," was the reply, "that is the family of Chi Noui. When the church building was built, they were eager to give something, but they had no money, so they sold the only ox they had and gave the money to the church. This spring, they are pulling the plow themselves."

The lawyer and businessman were silent for a few moments, until the businessman finally spoke up and said, "That must have been a real sacrifice." "They did not call it that," said the missionary. "They thought it was fortunate they had an ox to sell."

The two tourists did not have much to say after that, but when they reached home, the lawyer took the picture to his pastor and told him of the incident. "I want to double my offering to the church," he said, "and give me some plow work to do. I never have known what sacrifice for the Lord really means. I am ashamed to say I never have given anything to the Lord that really cost me something."

For me, what takes my breath away is when the missionary says that the family of Chi Noui thought that they were fortunate that they had an ox to sell. **With Grateful Hearts We Give!** This Korean family was grateful for everything that Jesus had done for them in dying for their sins and giving them eternal life. What we see is an attitude about wealth and service and what matters the most. They were willing to give up much to simply express their gratitude for Jesus and their faith in him to provide for all their needs. It's an astounding example that is like the early Christians who saw heaven as their home.

Truth be told, stories like that can make us feel sheepish. It can be embarrassing and even cause us to feel ashamed and guilty. Sometimes I think back to the past history of Pilgrim and recall people who built this congregation with their own hands and others who took out mortgages on their homes to provide the necessary funds for us to sit in this building this morning. And then there's the widow in our gospel lesson who can really make us feel uneasy. I mean she is in terrible poverty and she gives all that she has. And you know what? Jesus doesn't lift a finger to stop her from doing it. That's because she seeks first the saving rule of her Savior and is confident that her Savior is going to take care of her. The text doesn't say it, but does any of us doubt that Jesus took care of her? I'm sure he did according to his promises.

After watching this poor widow giving in accordance with her poverty and the rich folks who gave according to their wealth, Jesus gives the verdict: "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." This is not a command that everyone should go out and empty their bank accounts and give it all to the church. What Jesus is setting before us is a way of seeing things that comes from faith in his salvation. In the words of one commentary, this poor widow serves "as an example of one who was rich toward God, who was not anxious about this life, but who sought first God's kingdom. She, like Jesus' other followers, are willing to sell everything and leave everything in her love for God."

It's those last words that are really crucial: "... in her love for God." This kind of love only exists because of the love of Jesus at the cross where there is the forgiveness of sins and the hope of paradise. It is a love that will be in conflict with our sinful flesh. There isn't any doubt that the poor widow had a sinful flesh and had to deal with it. But, regardless of the sinful flesh, when one has the gospel treasures of Jesus at the cross and empty tomb, one can be rich toward God because of the richness of Jesus. The widow, who gave everything she had with her two small coins, gave more in the eyes of God than all the rich people together who had given large amounts, but from what they had left over!

The giving of our time and treasures will always be a conflict within us on some level. For the sake of Jesus, it is comforting to know that this conflict is forgiven. Our Lord Jesus forgives us for all the moments when our being rich toward God has suffered due to various reasons. But the real attitude adjustment that we wrestle with in the Christian life rests with daily struggling with our sinful flesh and resting in the forgiveness of our sins, while seeing that our real treasure is in heaven.

Here it is good for us to remember what it is that truly gives us the ability to be like the poor widow. It is good for us to consider that the time in which when Jesus teaches about the poor widow is a few days before he will give himself up as an offering on the cross. He gives himself to make us rich in him through the forgiveness of sins and the hope of everything in him forever. Jesus offered his life for you and me. He was tortured, abandoned, and died so that we might have the truest treasure of him and all that is coming in the new creation.

Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians: "Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:2b)." Absorb those powerful words: "Christ loved us!" **With Grateful Hearts We Give!** What does God find when He reads our hearts? He finds much more than we

can imagine or understand. He reads our life story. He can see our misery, our hidden thoughts, those thoughts that we do not want anyone to discover, because they would fill us with shame. Jesus sees our need for cleansing, forgiveness, hope, and peace, and he freely gives all this and more to us in him. He looks at our hearts and discovers the damage caused by sin and he repairs the damage. He sees our condition of being lost and he seeks and finds us. He sees that we are aimless and without light and gives us life and meaning. He also sees our inability to present ourselves before God and be accepted and he declares us acceptable and will make us perfect. He sees the hopeless state of this fallen creation and promises something new. That's the real treasure that we have!

You see, it isn't the question: how much do you give to the Lord and why don't you give more? It's why we give what we give. Days before he went to the cross, when Jesus was teaching and observing everything in the temple, God had prepared a poor widow to give us a great lesson for the Christian life. As we sung in the last two verses of our sermon hymn (LSB 787): "At last He brought His offering / And laid it on a tree; / There gave Himself, His life, His love / For all humanity. Lord, help us all with you to yield / Whatever love demands / And freely give, as You have given, / With open hearts and hands." We should never underestimate who we are as children of God: how much or how little we have, or how God can use us to help and even save others. What is important is seeing Jesus, who gave everything on the cross. It truly is **With Grateful Hearts We Give!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott