

Dare to Risk; Dare to Give; Dare to Trust God
Mark 12:41-44
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Scripture Litany Mark 12:41-44

One: Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury.

Many: Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

One: Then Jesus 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.

Many: 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."

Eugene Peterson in his book the Message wrote a paraphrase account of this passage commonly known as the widow's mite or the widow's offering. He wrote:

One poor widow came up and put in two small coins--a measly two cents. Jesus called his disciples over and said, "The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they'll never miss, she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford--she gave her all."

I would like to share for a few minutes, from the theme, Dare to Risk; Dare to Give; Dare to trust God.

I hope this is a familiar passage of scripture for you. This text comes as Jesus was making his final trip to Jerusalem that would eventually lead him to the cross at Calvary. This story of the widow's offering challenges us regarding our financial giving and our overall stewardship of God's gifts and resources.

Here was a woman who had so very little, yet she put her own survival at risk, to give an offering unto God. Now I don't think anyone at SFBC is asking us during this stewardship season to put ourselves or our family at risk in order to support the ministry here. But we can't help ask ourselves, what risks are we willing to take to follow Jesus? What risks are we willing to take so the ministry of SFBC will be seen and known in this community and beyond?

Each of us have people in our lives who took risks, so that we could be our best selves. For some it was a librarian. For others it was a junior high school teacher, a coach, a youth pastor, or your spouse.

As I look back on my spiritual journey, I am forever grateful to those who poured themselves into me while I was a youth in high school. Those young adults who shared the good news of God's amazing love to a group of teenaged girls at weekly 7 am

breakfast bible studies had no idea their efforts would pay off. They took a risk and gave up a lot of sleep to share their love of God.

When we love God and believe that God has our backs--no matter what--, we do things that the world thinks are just crazy. We will quit a job without having another one to go to because we trust God will work it out. Now I'm not advocating that, but at times we have to take that leap of faith particularly when our inner spirit feels a divine nudge.

It doesn't make sense to others that someone would consider a career change when it appears that they are living the American dream. They have a good job, a solid relationship, a nice home, well behaved children--yet if this is your story--you know, there is this still small voice in your spirit that keeps nagging you to make a change. Living someone else's dream--even the American dream--won't make us happy.

It doesn't make sense to others that some of us will risk moving clear across the country, away from family and friends, to start a new life and a new adventure.

Yet, when we are deeply committed to following the Spirit's call, we will be moved to take risks. The woman who put her two coins in the treasury risked being ridiculed for having so little to give. She risked being pushed aside, and considered in the way. But in the end, it was her tiny gift that was held up as the shining example of faithfulness.

Those who gave a boat load of money to the offering probably felt their gifts should have been recognize because more is always better--right? Wrong!! God is not impressed with what we do to get attention. If we give money just so our name will be on a building, or so that we will have 50 yard line or court side seats, that is not faithful giving. God looks at our motivation for what we do.

I think it is important to say that Jesus did not condone the social and cultural conditions that allowed this woman's survival to hang by a thread. In the previous paragraph in Mark, Jesus condemned the religious leaders who took advantage of the vulnerable--particularly the widows. Instead of protecting the vulnerable, some of the religious leaders took the widows' property for their own use. Perhaps the widows could no longer afford to pay taxes so their property was confiscated.

This widow was incredible because she was not going to be defined by the condition or situation that left her in poverty. She was not going to let her economic condition rob her of the joy of giving. She was going to honor God, by giving what she had. This widow took a risk by going forward with her gift and trusted that God would supply all her needs according to God's riches in glory.

As we assess our stewardship of God's gifts and resources our desire for entertainment and creature comforts may hinder a true accounting of what we have available to share with others. How can we say we have nothing to give when we buy five venti lattes and

five Top Pot donuts a week? Why is it we can only put \$10 a week in the offering, but save \$100 a week to go the Muckleshoot, Tulalip, or Snoqualmie Casinos?

Eugene Peterson said those who gave so much more than the widow gave what they wouldn't miss. Our desire for more and more things--the latest and the greatest, may confuse us with what is a need and what is a want. Do we really need an 75 inch ultra high def, smart, television or do we just want it? I'm not saying you ought not have it. I'm just saying we must be honest with what is a need expense and what is a want expense. The widow in our story had all kinds of needs, but she dared to give her best and to give her all to God.

Giving to God is different from cleaning out our closets and giving to Goodwill, or the Salvation Army. Yes, by giving to God through the church, and Goodwill and the Salvation Army, we will get a tax deduction if we itemize our tax returns. But we give to Goodwill and to the Salvation Army what we don't want, what no longer fits, and what is in the way. We are to give to God our best, the first fruit of our earnings, the best of our energy, the best of our thinking, not what is leftover.

When I was in seminary, there was a woman in Mount Zion Baptist Church named Sister Willie Mae Hill. Some would say Sister Willie May was a bubble off plumb. Others would say she was just crazy. But about once a month, she would give my mother \$2, \$3, or \$5 to send to me in Rochester, NY. My mother would wrap the money in a note she would send me letting me know this money was from Sister Willie Mae Hill. It baffled me, why Sister Hill would send me this money. It wasn't enough money for me to do my laundry. I certainly couldn't buy a book with the money. Perhaps I could buy a couple of chicken wings to eat on Sunday nights for dinner when the refectory was closed.

I also knew Sister Hill was a retired domestic worker. She survived financially by cleaning other people's houses. She had no retirement and probably no Social Security income. I knew she needed the money more than I did. But for three years, once a month she would send a tiny gift to me. Sister Willie Mae Hill gave because she loved God, and she loved me (even though I too thought she was crazy.) Sister Hill dared to give because she wanted to give her best. And now, remembering her and her gifts mean everything to me. I am challenged by her example of generosity to go and do likewise.

So where are those areas in your life where you are challenged to give your all. It may not be in the area of finances, maybe you are being challenged to give your all in your marriage that has grown routine and lifeless. Maybe you are being called to give your all to a new venture that had haunted you for years, that book, that degree, that new business. Maybe you are being called to start that healthier lifestyle even though the holidays are upon us. I'm here this morning to tell you God's got your back. Dare to give your all to what God has placed on your heart.

Lastly, dare to trust God. The widow in our text didn't know where her next meal would come, but she trusted God to work out the details. Too often we put off following that spiritual yearning within because we can't see how all the details will work out. When I was working on my CFP (Certified Financial Planner) designation, I kept telling God. I don't see how this is going to work, I am a pastor at heart and I really just want to tell people about Jesus. Understanding derivatives, puts, and calls, is not my thing. But, throughout that journey, God kept telling me, I've got this. You have to trust me. I knew I was on the right path and I was doing what God wanted me to do, but I couldn't see how it was all going to work out. But that was not my job.

Sometimes we have to stay in our lane, amen, and not venture into God's lane. It is OK to say, God I don't see how this is going to work out, but I trust you. We can trust God with our health issues, with our finances, with our relationships issues, and with all that concerns us in life. We may not see the full picture, but the path will unfold one step at a time. It is up to us to stay focused on the journey God has placed before us.

The widow put in her last two coins and trusted God for the rest. In like manner, Jesus gave his all when he gave his life for us on Calvary. And we rejoice that the Jesus story doesn't end at the cross, but starts all over again with the empty tomb on Sunday morning.

Jesus said, I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly. So dare to trust God. An old hymn writer said, Great is Your faithfulness, O God Creator. God gives strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine with ten thousand besides. Great is God's faithfulness.

The widow trusted God with her two coins. We have so much more than two coins. And so many more reasons to trust God all the more.