

## “TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR MONEY”

Reverend Jim Dennis, Jr.  
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Sermon Text: Mark 12:38-44

I recently read a book, a collection of Mark Twain's humor, and I do love Mark Twain's humor. His quick wit, though, often cut to the bone. Many of you will remember his sayings. One that I like is "Man is the only animal that blushes, or needs to." A business man of questionable ethics once said to Twain, "Before I die, I mean to climb to the top of Mount Sinai and read The Ten Commandments aloud." Twain replied, "I have a better idea. Why don't you just stay here and keep them?" Perhaps closer to home for many of us are these words, "It's not the passages in the Bible that I don't understand that bother me. It's the ones I do understand."

Today's Gospel lesson, I believe, is clear to us all, but in varying degrees, it also bothers us all. Jesus is watching worshipers place their temple offerings into the collection basket. That's bothersome in and of itself. He sees many rich people put in large sums, and he sees a poor widow put in two copper coins that total a penny. Jesus calls his disciples, and said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others contributing to the treasury." For they contributed out of their abundance, had a lot left over, she out of her poverty has put in everything she had. The lesson is clear and unambiguous. Jesus could say that the poor widow had put in more than others because he knew that her gift, however small, was given sacrificially and with complete trust in God that she would have something for the next day. Her gift of everything she possessed, however meager, symbolized her unconditional trust, her complete surrender of her entire being to God.

Once, a young man approached his girlfriend's father. Now this is not about my daughter's boyfriend, Adam, who is here today, but it's not about him. Once, a young man approached his girlfriend's father, and said, "Sir, there is something important that I would like to ask you. I was wondering if you could, what I mean is, I was wondering, if you would, if I, would you be willing to . . ." And the father finally grabbed him and shook him and embraced him warmly, and said, "Of course, my boy, of course, I'll give you permission to marry my daughter. Her happiness is all I want in the world." And the young man was completely puzzled. He said, "Permission to, no, no, no, no, that's not it sir." He said, "You see I am one payment late on my car payments, and I just didn't have the money, and I was wondering if you could lend me \$100?" And the father snapped back, "Certainly not, young man, I hardly know you!" Money changes everything. Money is in a category all by itself. We say and we pray, "Lord, I trust you with my life, my family, my soul in eternity, but when it comes to money, I better handle that." Take my life and let it be, Lord, but when it comes to my money, Lord, I hardly know you.

A brand new, first year minister was asked to speak at a Rotary Club meeting, and again, this is not about my brand new son-in-law, who is a minister, it's not about him. He felt flattered by the invitation until the club president, right at the meeting, stood up, and

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introduced him, and said, “Unfortunately our original choice to be today’s speaker was unable to attend,” and then his clumsy attempt at humor came next. You folks know about clumsy attempts at humor, don’t you? He pointed to a broken window pane covered over with a piece of cardboard. He said, “Our speaker is like that piece of cardboard on the window. He’s a substitute.” Now the new minister was a little bit offended by the sloppy introduction, and the young preacher decided to show them good, substitute or not, he was going to do a great talk, and he did, and when he finished, he got a rousing ovation. And then the president returned to the lectern, and his attempt to thank the speaker was even more awkward than the introduction. “Reverend, he said, “We want you to know that you were not at all like a piece of cardboard substitute. You were indeed a real pane.”

Now in the opening verses of today’s Gospel reading, Jesus instructs the disciples to beware of certain individuals who, by Jesus’ own description, must have been real panes. “Beware of scribes who like to go about in long robes.” This one sort of gets me. “Long robes, and go about in the market places and have the best seats in the synagogue and market places and at the places of honor at the feast. Beware of them, they also are stealing widows’ houses.” You know the type. Puffed up. Status seeker. Always trying to impress. Always reaching for compliments. The scribes fit the mold of those who would prefer the company of the rich, who put the large sums into the treasury at no real sacrifice, over the company of the poor widow, who put in the tiny sum, but at a great sacrifice. And there will always be those who are self-satisfied and live for the applause of others, and the scribes seem to be among them. And there will always be a few who will be satisfied only when completely cast upon God, body, mind, soul and assets. The trusting widow was one of them. And we often repeat at funerals, “Blessed are the saints for they will rest from their labors, and their deeds, their deeds follow them.” There is a multiplication of what we do with our trust in God. No matter how quietly, how secretly we do something, some one or two always know, and perhaps the one is God alone, but someone knows. And just as Jesus was watching what was put into the collections, someone knows and is affected by our deeds. And our deeds done out of trust in God, our deeds live after us as they impress and inspire others to trust God more.

I remember a young family man in one of my former churches. He had three small children. He worked for General Tire up in Charlotte, and when his union went out on strike, he came to me as his preacher, and he decided, he said, “Jim, I have decided to double my tithe.” Now, he had just gone out on strike! Now, I’m a preacher, and I encourage trusting God, but I said, “Whoa, now wait!” And I tried to talk him out of it, and he looked at me funny, and he said, “Jim, I feel funny saying this to you, but I trust God with my money.” I said, “Okay, perhaps you’ve taught me something.” And it did

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turn out okay for him, and his radical trust in God, not just with his money, but in many other crises that came through his life, he met with a strong faith that has impressed me and influenced me over the years. And so has this unnamed widow influenced countless others, 2,000 years after the event.

Last night, I was telling an old friend at my 30<sup>th</sup> high school reunion. I know, I don't look that old, but at my 30<sup>th</sup> high school reunion, you should have seen some of the others who were there, I was telling him, he asked, “What is your weekly need?” And I told him what our weekly need is, well, our monthly need anyway. I think that it is about \$67,000.00 a month. And we missed one Sunday due to ice, and I told him all this, and he said to me, “It sounds like it's time for the widow's mite to make a visit.” And he's a Presbyterian. Apparently, they have the same Bible that we have! This widow has been visiting and inspiring radical trust in God with our money for years and in churches across the world. She has inspired many to give from the heart and to trust God to be able to live with what is left over. Each of us has a God given potential for service according to our own unique gifts, and real meaning in our life and real fulfillment is realized when we are willing to share our unique gifts, our talents, our achievements, and indeed, our possessions. Kept secret, kept closed in, and locked up and safe, our gifts turn to dust. It is not in the hoarding, but in the sharing of our gifts that we grow in understanding of our life's meaning and purpose. It is in sharing our gifts that we grow in understanding of the meaning of abundant life, which is to know God. Peace and joy come from being connected and involved with God and with others, and it is in sharing our gifts that we grow in faith and in understanding of the life that God wants for us all.

You know Andy Warhol, one thing he's famous for is saying that in the future we'll all be famous for about 15 minutes. In Jesus' day and among his people, the scribes enjoyed a certain celebrity status, but now they are all by name forgotten individually, but the poor widows had no status at all, and yet the spirit and the wholehearted trust of this one poor widow has endured through the ages as a symbol of a right relationship with God. There is an old story about a man watching from his window. He watched a little boy run up to a high fence and try to throw himself up over the top, and he could almost get his leg up and over, and then he'd fall back down again on the same side of the fence. Over and over, he attacked this fence. And he would fall short and back on the same side each time. Then finally, the boy would catch his breath, he would lean down on his knees, and he was just breathing hard, just heaving there. He pondered for a little while. He stared mean at the fence for a little while, and then he did a strange thing. He took off his nice red hat, and he threw it over the fence! The man watching just couldn't stand it anymore. He went out, and he asked, he said, “Why did you throw your hat over the fence?” Well with perfect little boy logic, those of you who have little boys understand this kind of

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thinking, he said, “Well, I need to get to the other side, and I thought if I threw my hat over there, it would make me try even harder.”

Look around, this beautiful sanctuary, and know that many, many people now gone before us gave all that they had, trusted God with their money, gave sacrificially, and built this building for generations yet unborn, for us. And through their example before us, they influenced Greenwood, and through the people who have passed through here and trusted God with gifts of all kinds, God’s love has grown throughout the entire world. And now it is this generation’s turn to give it all, give it all you have got. Think of the boy who threw his hat over the fence, and think again of the poor widow, and instead of throwing your hat, think about throwing your heart, and you may feel the urge to give even more and, to beat the illustration to death, here at Main Street United Methodist Church, we have thrown our collective hat over the fence. I know that some of you did not agree with building this building. I know that, but the fact is, the building is almost built. And the programs are being planned and manned and womanned, and the furnishings and the equipments are being bought, and the extended outreach into our community is moving forward, and will bear fruit. We are on the edge of something huge. That harvest is coming. But right this moment, our hat is way over the fence, and we have tried ever so hard, but there is no clever way to say it. We must try harder, and we must dig deeper. Right now, we are here. We are the congregation that God has entrusted to build for the future. We have been given more than enough to meet our needs and for every good cause. The final question is, “Do we trust God with our money?” We have begun well. We have counted the cost. The bill is coming due. Our hat is over the fence. Let’s go get it! Now, I’ll be down there in a few minutes after the closing hymn and after the Benediction. The plates will still be right here. And I know that second collections are absolutely anathema. We do not do that. It is simply not done. Okay. This is an altar call to trust God with your money during the closing hymn if you feel so inclined. Amen.