

The Widow's Mighty Mite

Mark 12:38-44

Sermon Notes from the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois

25th Sunday after Pentecost, November 11, 2018

Veteran's Day

Matt Matthews

Daniel Ruettiger, at 5'6" and 165 pounds, was a walk-on football player for The University of Notre Dame. He wasn't very big, which made it difficult to contribute to a team that required big players, but he was devoted and he made the scout team, a practice squad that helps the varsity team practice for games. He was considered by many to be the hardest working player on both the scout and the starting team. Until the last game of his senior year, he was never a starter, but was always profoundly respected for giving 110-percent on the practice field.

Coach Dan Devine (formerly of Green Bay) put Ruettiger in for three plays against Georgia Tech on November 8, 1975. The first play was a kickoff. The second was an incomplete pass. The third and final play of Ruettiger's senior season with the Fighting Irish, he recorded a quarterback sack.

After the game, Ruettiger was carried off the field by his teammates, an expression of honor that, apparently, had never before happened at Notre Dame.

They made a movie about Ruettiger called Rudy. It's an inspiring film about this kid who worked so hard and believed so proudly in his team. He gave everything he had for his teammates, for the fans, for the game.

Every Christian knows that being a disciple of Jesus has to do with giving everything you have. Jesus gave all he had and that sets the bar pretty high. We never achieve such height, but when we are at our best we find ourselves always faithfully reaching. And serving. And praying.

I'm reminded of the story that has long made its way around pulpits. You've heard it before, I'm sure. I don't remember the details, but the point is seared in my memory. A girl needs a blood transfusion because she's sick. The transfusion will save her life. Her twin brother is a donor match, and the little boy agrees to donate the blood that will save his little twin sister. Doctors and nurses did little to prepare him for what to expect, because as he is giving his blood, as he's watching it leave his body, he calmly and innocently asks the nurse, "When am I going to die?"

He thought that giving blood to his sister would save her and kill him. And he was willing to give, anyway. He was willing to give everything.

Discipleship.

What are you willing to give to God through your ministry of care with and for others? How are you spending your life? I know stewardship season is over, but stewardship is a theme that won't go away. Stewardship is part and parcel of the Christian life. How will I be a faithful disciple today? What am I going to do with my life to serve others? What am I going to give?¹

The Gazette has run a series of vignettes about kindness lately. It's a timely theme. When have you seen an example of kindness that inspired you?

One man told the story of being at a McDonalds. A little boy stood in line and was excited to be waiting to spend a gift card he had gotten for a birthday. When the girl in front of him spilled her whole tray of food onto the floor, the little boy immediately offered to use his gift card to replace her meal.

That card was everything he had at the moment. And he was willing to sacrifice his joy, so that she could have her joy.

For the record, I would do that, too. Had I been at McDonalds, I would have offered to get that little girl a meal. But if I had to use my only gift card on her, if I would have to miss my meal, if I had to make that kind of sacrifice, and if I were 12-years-old? I probably would not have helped.

The way it works for me—and I suspect a lot of us—is: If I have a lot, I'll give a little. But if I only have a little, I'm not sure I'd give anything.

This is what Jesus noticed about the widow in our story.

Jesus sat down with his disciples near the temple treasury. Jesus watched people putting money into the offering plate. The scripture says, "Many people put in large sums."

When the old widow hobbles up, Jesus takes special notice. She didn't give a lot. Jesus watched her put in two small copper coins, which, together, are worth a penny. The King James Version of the Bible calls these coins "mites" and says that together they are worth a mere farthing. She didn't have a bag of money, just two coins. Two coins you could hold between your pinched thumb and forefinger. One. Two. Not much.

The man who is so good at turning the world upside down calls his disciples over. *That widow, he says, gave more than all the rest.*

They want to know what we want to know. How could two coins be of more value than bags of money? Jesus says, *She gave all she had. Everybody else gave a small portion of their abundance. She, out of her poverty, "put in everything she had, all she had to live on."* She is a living, breathing parable.

Are you going to be a disciple like that? Am I?

A theology of scarcity teaches this: you might not have enough. Don't give to others unless you're sure you have plenty. According to this theology of scarcity, we're never really sure we have plenty, so we never really give. And the living parable of this widow suggests if we don't give, we never really live.

But give we must. It's funny the way it works, but it does work this way: **the more we give the more we have to give.** Compliments, flowers, laughter. Our money, our time, our work, our friendship. **We give and our capacity to give grows.**

The widow trusted God. She gave what she had to the one she loved and trusted. She gave her all. That's how I want to give.

I'm working on it.

What about you?

AMEN

Here's a post-sermon extra, a three-minute story about a father and daughter who disagree about politics. They risk a lot in this conversation at StoryCorps. Unlike the widow in our story, they don't give everything, but they give a lot. Maybe places like this are good places for us to start in our continued efforts to be sacrificial givers. Here is another living, breathing parable.

<https://storycorps.org/animation/family-politics/>

Mark 12:38-44 38As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! 40They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

41He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43Then he 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. 44For 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."

¹ ¹ We sang this beautiful lyric at Eric's installation a few weeks ago. It describe discipleship well:

*Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?*