

The St. John's Pulpit

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MONEY, MINISTRY AND MISSION – Part 1

Gospel of Mark 12:41-44

Steward's Sunday

Eleventh Sunday in Kingdomtide, November 12, 2017

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It happened in Winthrop University's dining hall. He approached a bowl of bright red polished apples and a sign: *'One per person; God is watching.'* Near the checkout were four platters of freshly baked cookies with a sign: *'Take all the cookies you want; God is watching the apples.'*

Your relationship with money is lived between those signs. You know *"God is watching."* Yet, you hear many voices saying, *"Take all you want."* And, between those two messages, the many voices saying, *"take all you want,"* wrestle against your discipleship as God's financial steward.

You are a wonderful and dedicated people. I do not need to badger you about living generously. That said, as followers of Jesus, you should be reminded of how important your money is to him.

-One sixth of all Jesus' teachings are related to financial stewardship.

-One third of Jesus' parables speak about financial stewardship.

-Jesus spoke five times more about financial stewardship than he did about prayer. (It is as if Jesus knew *'where your money is, there is where your prayers will be focused.'*)

So, today, as we consider how our financial commitments reflect our commitment to God, I ask you to look at this story of the widow giving two coins and consider two ideas with me

In this story from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus went to the Temple as one of his last actions of public ministry before he was arrested. Jesus challenged people to live in a relationship of commitment with God. So, Jesus went into the area of the Temple near the Gate Beautiful, a magnificent 60 feet wide artistic masterpiece overlaid with gold, silver and bronze. This gate separated the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women. Near the Gate Beautiful were thirteen collection chests shaped like trumpets. Nine of the thirteen trumpet chests were for the tithes of the people; the 10% which was required of the worshippers. The other four were for designated gifts. In other words, the 10% was expected; offerings were voluntary.

Jesus sat down and watched the people putting money into the treasury. (*Do you ever imagine Jesus watching you put your money into the offering plate? Sorry; is that meddling?*) As Jesus watched, he did not focus on the giving of the nine tithe chests. Jesus focused on the other four trumpet chests; those gifts were offerings of worship, commitment and vision. Jesus watched many people give large sums of money from their overflow. In other words, they gave what they could afford to give after they had already taken care of all their other commitments. Please notice Jesus DID NOT condemn their giving. Yet, when he saw the poor widow put in one coin for her tithe and then put in her only other coin into one of the four offering chests, he called together his followers and crowned her as the model of financial stewardship. **She is our example because she offered herself first to God for God's work in the world. She realized that she was a steward of life and each of her possessions.**

Consider two ideas with me: **First, CHOOSE TO BECOME A MATURING STEWARD.** You may be familiar with Transactional Analysis or TA. TA suggests that, within you, there are three scripts running all the time. These scripts are **Parent, Adult** and **Child**. Your **Parent** script offers you thoughts, feelings and behaviors learned from your parents or other adult caregivers when you are young. Your **Parent** script offers some positive messages and some negative messages. Some are loving, positive, nurturing, and encouraging which help you pursue goals and set limits in healthy ways. However, some **Parent** messages are critical or prejudged perspectives that demand authority and control. Your **Adult** script is your data-processing center and helps you make decisions based on the content you have at your disposal and the context in which you find yourself. Your **Child** script offers you both a **Child-like** voice that is creative, playful, collaborative and open to new information and realistic possibilities as well as a **Childish** script is rebellious against authority, cynical and negative toward some realities and opportunities – especially when you must humble yourself to allow another person to influence or impact your life.

These scripts show up in the lives of Jesus' disciples in the 21st Century. When Jesus' teachings about money are placed alongside other commitments, situations, relationships and visions, these scripts show up. Sometimes, a person chooses to allow their Adult script to carry the day. But, at other times, a person decides to take a position of authority and control or to rebel against Jesus' teachings about money by listening to the sign, *'take all you want.'* Each of us is constantly choosing how we will be shaped by the Holy Spirit of God.

I have some gifts for you today. (Walk into the congregation tossing pennies and then hold up two \$100 bills.) I am about to give these two \$100 bills to two people. Let's see, to whom should I entrust 10,000 pennies? (Give to two trusted members; one female and one male.) So, First, **CHOOSE TO BECOME A MATURING STEWARD**

Second, **REGARDING YOUR FINANCES, KEEP THREE WORDS IN MIND – THEE, WE AND ME.** **Money** forces you to deal with your commitment to the **ministry** of Jesus and the **mission** of God. Money is the primary tangible expression of your discipleship unto Jesus. **So, in this season of Financial Stewardship Commitments, I encourage you to keep in mind three words: Thee, We and Me.** Jesus affirmed this widow's financial commitment because her financial gift was not focused on the 'me' of herself; or the 'we' of human need; but on the 'Thee' of worship and obedience. She had a vision motivated by God's vision.

It is my hope that your commitments to be actively faithful in financial stewardship for 2018 will empower St. John's to use **Money** to increase the impact of our church's **Ministry** in our support of God's **Mission**. I especially hope we can do two things next year: First, I hope we can set aside some significant resources for Messaging and Media to let other people know about us and how we share God as Love in a world where many churches emphasize being judgmental. Second, I hope we can increase our support of local and global missions.

A few years ago, a member of St. John's said to me, *"I have learned that I can be a cheerful giver if I know God is pleased with my commitment."* She was saying, *"Thee, We and Me."*

We are part of Christ's Church, OFFERING OURSELVES FOR GOD'S WORK IN THE WORLD. Let us make our commitments this week as if Jesus is watching. Amen and AMEN.