

First Trinity Lutheran Church
November 11, 2012
32nd Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 12:38-44

Making A Sacrifice

The story is told of "A wealthy Christian was going to take a round the world tour. His pastor asked him to take pictures of anything which he thought was unusual. While traveling through Korea he saw in a field a boy pulling a crude plow, while an old man held in his hands the handles. The traveler was somewhat shocked to see this and took a picture.

Commenting to the guide, he said, "That is an unusual sight. I suppose they are very poor." "Yes," came the answer. "They are poor, that is the family of Chi Noui. When the church was being built in this area they were excited to give something to help it along, but they had no money so they sold their only ox and gave the money to the church. This spring they are taking turns pulling the plow themselves." The traveler said thoughtfully, "That must have been a real sacrifice" The guide said, "They did not call it that." They thought it was fortunate they had an ox to sell."

The traveler was real quiet after that event. When they reached home, the traveler took the picture to his pastor. As he sat down in the pastor's study he said forcefully, "I want to double my pledge to the church. And please give me some plow work to do. I have never known what sacrifice for the church meant. A Christian in Korea taught me. I am ashamed to say I have never yet given anything to my church that cost me anything."

In today's Gospel, Mark tells us that as Jesus sat at the temple near the alms containers and He watched people making their contributions one woman stood out from the rest. The scene was full of the noise of coins dropping. The big receptacles, shaped like tuba horns made a lot clanging of metal on metals. Yet it was this one woman gift that caught Jesus' attention. Jesus said, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.

For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything. Why was this giving so different, so unusual? Because this widow was willing to give from the heart. Her love of God knew no bounds. She gave even though she couldn't afford it. She gave because she wanted to give. She was not compelled by guilt, or fear, or reward, she gave because she was in love, in love with God. She gave sacrificially.

When giving to done sacrificially it is linked to trust as seen in our first lesson from the Book of Kings. In this story Elijah is commanded by God to go into a Gentile city and there a widow will care for him. To understand this story you need to know that there was a great famine and drought in the land that had already lasted for three years. This widow was giving to Elijah the small meal she had planned for herself and her son. Their only meal of the day and according to the woman this will be their last because after this they will die. She was on her last bit of strength. She had fought for three years the hardships of this famine and drought, now her strength was failing, her will power to live was going fast. But Elijah comes to her and says, "please make me a cake out of the only bit of food you have left." And what does the widow do, she trusts in the saying of Elijah as he says, "The jar of meal and oil shall not go empty until the Lord sends rain upon the earth." This woman trusted the word from this stranger and she fed Elijah and her son for many days. She trusted, she risked for God and God provided for her. Now notice it didn't say that she ate better than before. She ate the same meal and used the same oil for cooking, but there was plenty. She trusted God to provide not to extremes, but in a simple way. She wasn't hoping she would win the DC, lottery, she was hoping God would give her some meal to continue to make cakes for her family, and God did just that. God came through. He delivered. God continued to be with that widow as he promised, as they ate God provided.

During the next few Sundays up until Advent we are going to be focusing on Saints.

Last Sunday, all Saints Sunday, we looked at how we are all saints. This Sunday we are focusing on Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours who was born in 316 in Hungary. At the age of 15 Martin joined the Roman Army. The story is told that Martin was approached by a homeless man who was naked. Martin cut his Army cloak and gave half to the man. After this experience his life dramatically changed because that very night he had a dream that the man who he gave the coat to was Jesus. A short time later he wanted to leave the army because he could no longer fight, instead he was put in prison. Some years later after being discharged from prison Martin became a monk and established one of the first monasteries in France. Then by 371 he was made Bishop of Tours which was basically the archdiocese of the Catholic Church in France. Martin Luther was named after Martin of Tours on the day he was baptized November 11 the day after his birth. Martin of Tours was known for his zeal for spreading the Gospel and for his care on behalf of prisoners and people who are sentenced to death. Also noted worthy on this Veterans Day Martin of Tours is the Patron saint of the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps.

So how do these stories of the two widows and Martin of Tours have to do with our life today? Can we relate to their sacrificial living, can we put our complete trust in God to care of us? Where are you on this? Or maybe this all seems so foreign like a story out of a fairy tale book. Have you experienced the joy of sacrificial giving, the extreme happiness of a deep love for God in which giving becomes a source of joy and not a duty? Can you give and trust God completely to provide without thinking of getting it back or having regrets that you even gave?

In a few moments we will sing the hymn "Take my Life and let it be." What is that we can give to God, our hands, our feet, our voice, our lips, our money, our intellect? It is all part and parcel of our very lives. The Hymn seems to say everything we have is God's and in love we give it back to him.

The two widows are a source of inspiration, the first was a sign to Elijah that God was still with him, and the second was a message to us from Jesus to live in complete trust that God will provide, and so we can sacrificially give to Him from our blessings. You and I are signs from God for each other as we walk this journey of faith. I see your witness in your lifestyle and you see mine, and hopefully, we can draw strength from each other. But that is only possible as you and I are walking the road of faith as Jesus would want us to, living sacrificially and trusting in God's care to provide. The question can be asked each of us, are we a good examples for our brothers and sisters in Christ. As a brother or sister looks at my life or your life can they draw encouragement for their faith? Can another see in you or me a love for Christ and a love for God which allows me to trust completely in His power so that I can live sacrificially? What does another see as they observe your life?

Soon we will be into the Christmas season. I heard that Wal-Mart has already decided to move Black Friday, the great shopping day, to Thanksgiving Day. Great idea? It is so hard, after all, not to give in to the cultural and calculate our worth via our possessions and to measure Christmas in relation to the number of gifts we give and receive. But maybe, just maybe, if we remember that we are called to be stewards of each other – each member committed to the welfare and wellbeing of the rest of the community – maybe we can experience again and anew God's blessing of us in and through the family of faith. This is the witness of these two widows who gave all they had, and the witness of St. Martin of Tours. "Take my life that I maybe consecrated Lord for thee." Amen