

There were thirteen receptacles in the courtyard of the Temple. They looked like baskets, essentially. Worshippers would walk up and drop in their coins. They had no paper money, just copper or silver or gold. Sometimes people would mill around and watch, to observe what others were giving. Can you imagine the scene? Hmm...only two silver coins, must be a rough year.

Then along comes a woman, a widow, obviously poor, with a couple little copper coins. These were the smallest in circulation—by today’s standards, a fraction of a cent. But Jesus calls her offering the greatest of all. Other guys gave more in raw dollars, but she gave all she had to live on. We all know the story, don’t we? The rich gave, and they gave out of their abundance. It was a surplus, an overflow. They made a lot and they gave a lot. The woman gave all she had.

So what is this story about? Well, it’s about giving an offering to God, right? Of course it is. But it is a specific kind of giving that Jesus applauds here, and it’s not about the dollar amount. It’s the kind of giving that can only come from real faith.

Faith (in a wide sense) recognizes what God has done in the past and believes He will continue to do for us in the future. The widow that Jesus praised had so little of everything—except faith. She had lost her husband and all that he provided. Yet somehow, she believed God had done right by her and trusted that he would continue to do so in the future. Giving back to God is primarily a question of faith—of faith that God will take care of you. The widow here trusted totally. What do you think of her example? How does it speak to your faith, and your approach to giving?

This is a well-known Bible story, but there’s one thing no one knows. What happened to her after she gave? It is no accident that Mark doesn’t tell us. If he did, it would ruin the story. If he gave us some happy ending, we might think that the point is that if we do what God wants, God’s obligated to do what we want. You know, if I tithe, my income is guaranteed to increase next year. If I pledge or give “X amount,” God will make sure I don’t lose my job. But Mark doesn’t tell us anything about what happened to the widow. He especially doesn’t say that she won the Jerusalem lottery the next morning.

Mark fully intends to leave us in uncertainty about what happened to the widow, because our Christian offerings are always to be given in the face of uncertainty. They are always to be an exercise of faith. We don’t know about our jobs next year. We don’t know we won’t face catastrophic bills. We don’t know what our investments are going to do. Uncertainty.

But what we do have is a greater security. Our Epistle from Hebrews reminds us, “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time... to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” Here’s something that is never uncertain. Christ is coming back for us. His return is one certainty every Christian can hold on to. Jesus secured this for us. His death and resurrection has made it certain for everyone who believes. And if we mattered to God that much, we can also be certain that he’ll care for us every day in the meantime—somehow, some way.

This was the faith of the widow: faith that God would take care of her His way. Maybe a well-to-do widower would walk into her life tomorrow. Maybe friends would take her in. We don't know the whole story, and she couldn't possibly know it. She was giving despite uncertainty. You may have heard the phrase, "You can't out-give God." Those words are easy to say, but she was living it.

Ironically, this woman of great faith probably didn't realize that the One she was trusting was sitting so close to her that day. The One we trust is sitting right here beside us this morning. He sympathizes with your struggle. He understands financial uncertainty; His whole ministry was spent traveling, living day-to-day by the good graces of others. He understands your struggles against doubt, your fear about really committing your resources to God. He was tempted just as we are, but without ever giving in.

And that is **why** you and I can give in faith; that is **how** you and I can give in faith; with faith focused on Jesus, who did not hold back when it comes to giving. My generosity grows to the degree that I concentrate on the generosity Jesus showed when he went to the cross to pay for my sins. Your joy in sacrificial giving grows when you see it as a reflection of Jesus' sacrifice—it can be a living illustration of who Jesus is and how He does things. Scripture tells us that there was a joy set before Jesus in his sacrifice—a joy that enabled him to keep going, to even endure the cross—and do you know what it was? The joy of gaining you. The joy of cancelling your sin debt. The joy of stamping it "paid in full." The joy of opening the door of the kingdom and bringing you in. The joy of becoming your adoptive brother when you received the family name with the water of Holy Baptism. Jesus gave all of himself so these things could be true for you. In the face of life's uncertainties, let your giving be an act of faith; a heartfelt "thank you;" an offering of trust.