

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer.

There is a commercial on TV right now where the man is walking through the city with a dollar bill in his hand.

The point is to show that a dollar isn't worth much these days.

The man gets into a cab and he asks the cabbie

“how far can I get with this?”

And the cabbie says, “You can get out”

People probably thought the same back in Jesus' day about the worth of a mite (or a lepton as it was called).

Even two leptas put together were not worth anything.

Yet, Jesus sits in the Temple and watches many givers putting in their offerings,

Some gave very large sums.

But they are not the givers that he affirms.

Instead, he holds up a poor widow as an example of good giving.

This widow puts in her last two coins,

Two leptas,

coins so small that they probably didn't even make a sound when they were dropped into the metal container.

Now why would Jesus do such a thing?

It was clear that all the other worshipers had given more....

At least in quantity. At least in numbers.

And we can certainly get distracted by the numbers, can't we?

There seems to be a natural tendency to judge ourselves and others by the numbers.

If we are the ones who give the big bucks...

**we might tell ourselves “look how much more I give to the church and to God.”
my offering is really making a difference.**

Or we might be on other pole.

If we are the ones who can give only small numbers,

**we might tell ourselves, “why do I even bother? My measly gift certainly won't
make a difference.**

One of our members shared in bible study on Wednesday how this story has always been an inspiration to her.

She talked about a time in her life when she literally had nothing give.

And she felt really badly about that.

But remembering this story of the widow's mite,

She emptied all the coins from her piggy bank into a paper bag, and then wrote on the outside of the bag, “this is all I have, sorry I couldn't give more”, and then she placed it in the offering plate.

Remembering Jesus' response to the widow, this member gave from her heart, trusting that God would affirm and accept her sacrificial gift.

Jesus clearly knew that the widow gave less money.

**But Jesus wasn't interested in how much people gave.
Instead, he was interested in how much they had left.**

The others gave out of their abundance.

Abundance means having more than you need.

They gave

-out of what they could spare,

-out of what was left over,

-out of what they didn't think they would need to do the things that they wanted to do.

But that's not the kind of giving that Jesus affirms. .

Jesus does not focus on how much people give, but how much they have left.

A faithful gift is measured by the percentage of one's means which the gift represents.

Years ago, Ted Turner said that his giving of millions to the United Nations was really not a sacrifice at all, since it was merely extra money; interest that he made on his investments during the first nine month of one year.

It is not how much people give, it's how much they have left.

Generous giving is about starting from the right perspective.

Instead of asking ourselves how much of **our** resources we should give to God,

Jesus encourages us to flip the equation

and ask ourselves how much of **God's resources do we actually need to keep for ourselves.**

The widow in the story kept nothing for herself.

She trusted fully in God.

And when we realize that, the story is no longer such a nice little story.

It's actually a difficult story.

The truth is if she was here among us this morning,

And we knew that she was putting in the offering plate all she had to live on,

We would probably think she was crazy.

we would probably scold her.

And try to stop her.

We would rationalize and tell her that Jesus can't literally expect her to give her last two coins.

Think about it....her last two coins....all she had to live on.

Jesus can't possibly expect us to do that!

I mean:

God knows that we have bills, and responsibilities,

God knows we have financial worries and fears, especially in this present economy.
 God knows that we have rents and mortgages and car payments, and school tuitions.
 God knows that we have medical needs, and insurance costs and comfort needs.

And giving is not just about money.

We have our gifts and our time and our talents to give as well.

.And God knows how busy our schedules are.

Jesus can't possibly expect us to give all we have to live on.

Or does he?

One thing is for sure.

Jesus wants to shake us up.

He wants to change the way we look at giving.

He wants us to see that it's not so much about how much we give.

It's about how much we have left.

The widow in our lesson for today was in desperate straits
 she, like other widows, lived each day at the mercy of others.

There was no inheritance

no social security,

no Medicare,

all she had was her faith.

And in her faith, she gave all she had to live on...

Holding back nothing....

And in doing so,

She was foreshadowing what Jesus was about to give.

his very life for the sake of the world.

Our lesson for today invites us to reflect on our own giving.

And to ask ourselves the hard question:

What have I been holding back from God?

We have to ask ourselves whether:

our giving has been sacrificial and planned, or whether it has been automatic,
 something that we don't even think about?

We have to ask ourselves whether:

we have been giving out of your abundance or whether our giving has actually cost us
 something.

We have to ask ourselves whether:

We have been giving back with the same kind of commitment that God has given to us.

Think about it:

- While we are giving *some* of our money to God each week, how much are we holding back?

- While we are giving an hour or two of our time each week to God here in worship and outreach, what are we doing with the other 166 hours that we are holding back?
- While we are giving 5 minutes a day in prayer, what about the other 1435 minutes a day that we are holding back?

the widow gave all she had to live on....

But what good were those two leptas to God? to the Temple?

Could her little offering actually make a difference?

Perhaps that's the key to this whole thing.

Perhaps our giving is not for God's sake.

(For really God needs nothing that we have to offer)

Perhaps our giving is for our sake!

Perhaps when we learn to give from our hearts we grow spiritually.

Perhaps when we learn to give from our hearts, we become the Body of Christ in action.

Perhaps when we learn to give from our hearts, we don't just support the ministry and mission of the Christ's church,

We actually become the ministry and mission of Christ.

We all have something to give. Time, talent, treasure.

We all have something to give. Love, compassion, service to others.

May our giving be intentional and sacrificial.

and may it be a reflection of our gratitude and trust in our most Generous God.

Amen