

**PRACTICAL MATTERS:  
GIVING MATTERS  
LUKE 21:1-4  
SEPTEMBER 30, 2012**

With a sermon title like that, you know what's coming.

Just so you know,

this will be the only sermon this season when I talk strictly about  
what the Bible says about financial giving.

Throughout October we'll be celebratin the ministries funded by your giving  
and the lives that are touched.

But today is about giving.

When I preach about giving,

I always mention biblical teaching on tithе,

giving 10% of your income to fund God's work.

The prophet Malachi says if you don't tithe you are robbing God. (Mal.3:9)

I would never have the nerve to say that,

but I can read the text of Scripture,

and you can just have a conversation with Malachi and God.

While Jesus did not command tithing, he did mention it.

He told the Pharisees they should do justice and mercy

without neglecting the tithe

(Mt.23:23)

Without neglecting the tithe.

He did not command the tithe because *he presumed they would* tithe.

Jesus did talk a lot about financial giving.

For instance, Jesus and his followers were hanging out at the temple one day.

They were impressed by the donations given by some big money people.

Bankers and hedge fund executives and investment brokers and power brokers and such.

Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, Mitt Romney and Barack Obama type people.

All money was coins then.

And if you were giving a large amount,

you could drop it in the offering receptacles in such a way that

it would clang loudly against the metal sides.

A noise that was sure to impress anyone nearby.

While they were at the temple, Jesus and his friends noticed this.

**LUKE 21:1-4**

They could not miss the rich folks dropping in their money.

But Jesus' attention went to the offering of a poor widow.

She came to the temple, to the offering trumpet,

and put in two coins called lepta,

more commonly known today as the widow's mite.

**(TAKE OUT WIDOW'S MITE)**

I have one here.

The widow's mite is a rather unimpressive coin.

The only thing impressive about it is that now it's 2000 years old.

But it's a little bitty thing and was not worth much.

It was nothing compared to the large amounts those rich folks, the one percent, were giving.

No matter how hard you might throw it against the side of the offering trumpet,

it's not going to make an impressive sound.

She could have thought to herself:

“My little offering is so small, it's not enough to make a difference.”

Or: “I need it more than they do.”

But she gave it.

She gave *all* she had.

There was a time when Jesus challenged *someone else* to give all that they had.

This well-to-do young man wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life.

After some discussion of keeping the Ten Commandments,

Jesus challenged him,

“Sell all that you have and give the proceeds to the poor,  
and then come follow me.”

And the man was sad because he was rich.

(Lk.18:18-23)

Rich in money and stuff, but not spiritually rich.

Later, Jesus spent time with a man named Zacchaeus.

Zach was a tax collector.

Tax collectors were more despised then than now.

The taxes they collected fueled the empire

and paid the soldiers who patrolled the occupied regions.

And, worse yet, if they collected more tax money than was required,  
they could keep all the excess.

That was how some tax collectors got rich.

And how they lost all their friends except other tax collectors.

That was Zacchaeus' job.

That was why he was an outcast among his people.

And perhaps why he was so moved by Jesus sitting down and sharing a meal with him.

We don't know what was said or done at their lunch.

But Zach came out a changed man.

He voluntarily gave half his possessions to the poor  
and paid back anyone he had ever cheated.

(Lk.19:1-10)

We don't have access to his checkbook,

but I'll bet it cost him almost everything.

And in the text for today Jesus draws his followers' attention to this poor widow.

She *gave everything* she had.

Why would she do that?

It seems a bit short-sighted and even foolish to me.

Maybe she did it because God was more important to her than her own self.

God came first in her life.

You see, it's one thing to *say* God is #1 in your life.

It's something else to *really live* that way.

That's the way Jesus lived.

The Father was more important to him than himself.

And you and I are more important to Jesus than himself.

So for our sake, and in obedience to the Father,

Jesus gave all.

He gave up the glories of heaven to come to earth.

He gave up the heavenly throne room to enter into a womb.

He gave up streets of gold to walk the dusty roads of Judea.

He surrendered self-sufficiency to become a helpless baby.

He came sinless, holy, perfect, and pure,  
 but took on the sins of the world.  
 "He became sin, that we might become the righteousness of God." (2Cor.5:21)  
 And then the author of life gave up his life on the cross.  
 He suffered and died to pay for our sins.  
 And he did it willingly.  
 He said, "No one takes my life from me.  
 I lay it down of my own accord." (Jn.10:18)  
 He gave everything,  
 out of obedience to the Father  
 and because he loves you and me.  
 He did not want us to be separated from God in life or in eternity.  
 He wanted us to have abundant life,  
 and have it forever with him.

So he gave everything.

Jesus gave all.

How about you?

You see, the scary thing is, not only did Jesus give all.

He calls to us and says, "Take up your cross and follow me."

And when he says "follow me"

He means FOLLOW!

Do what he did.

Live as he lived.

Give as he gave.

So what will you give?

Gee, that tithe thing doesn't sound so bad, does it?

When I think of sacrificial giving I think of what a mother gives up for her babies.

The physical strain of pregnancy,

then having to organize life around the needs of

a helpless baby, a growing child, a teenager, a fledgling adult.

It means reorienting every moment of every day, your waking and your sleeping,

your schedule, your finances, your housing, your automobile, everything.

Parents, and especially mothers give so much for a child.

And yet, with all of that,

Jesus gave more.

Jesus gave all.

For your sake and mine.

What will you give?

What does generosity, truly sacrificial generosity like that of Jesus, look like to you?

I'll tell you of a time when I saw it.

For one year of my life I toured with the musical group Up With People in 1977-78.

I played trumpet and sang and worked on the truck crew

loading and unloading eight tons of equipment for every show.

We spent three months in Mexico.

What made that really interesting was that

Up With People cast members stay in the homes of host families while touring.

We came to one particular town on the west coast of Mexico.

My assigned host family came to pick me up in an old, beat up VW Bug.

Three of them, me, my big suitcase, and my trumpet case.

It was a snug bug.  
 Off we went, down this street and that.  
 We turned off the paved street onto a gravel road,  
 which then gave way to a rutted dirt road.  
 As we drove, the homes grew more and more dilapidated.  
 There were chickens, goats and nearly naked children running around.  
 The homes grew poorer and poorer,  
 until we entered a neighborhood where all the homes  
 had sheets of plywood and corrugated tin patching holes.  
 My home for the next three nights was one of those homes.  
 They gave me the bedroom with a complete floor.  
 There were no decorations in their home except  
 a framed photo of the pope, a crucifix,  
 and three hand-carved wooden birds on an almost empty bookshelf.  
 They spoke no English,  
 and I spoke only a little more Spanish,  
 so we played charades a lot.  
 They fed me a good, hot breakfast every morning,  
 drove me to the cast's rendezvous point every morning,  
 and offered me dinner every evening after our shows.  
 It was all the very best they had.  
 When it was time for our cast to leave town,  
 we loaded my suitcase and trumpet case into the VW Bug.  
 I found myself standing by the car thinking about these people.  
 They had so little,  
 but they had shared it freely and generously  
 with a stranger from the U.S.  
 But they were not finished.  
 Before we pulled away into the street,  
 the mother brought to me two of their three carved wooden birds  
 and gave them to me as a gift.

**(SHOW THE BIRDS)**

These birds sit on a shelf in our family room.  
 They constantly remind me of the incredible generosity of that family.  
 They had so little.  
 But they shared it with me willingly, eagerly, joyfully, generously.  
 And their generosity has blessed me ever since.

How about you?

What will you give to the work of God through his church?  
 For the next few weeks we're going to talk,  
 not so much about money,  
 but about how your giving blesses others through the ministries of NWH.  
 I hope you'll come each Sunday to celebrate what God is doing through your giving.

Other scriptures cited: Mal.3:9; Mt.23:23; Lk.18:18-23; 19:1-10; Jn.10:18