

# Sermon for the Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

*'But she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'*

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*'How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle, than a rich man to enter the kingdom.'*

Not long ago our Lord pronounced such, after having sent a rich young man on his way *greatly saddened*.

This is a teaching of Christ which we are most prone to manipulate, for it is amazing how it always applies to another, yet never quite seems to apply to ourselves. For we know *the love of money is the root of all evil*. Yet it is never ourselves who love money. We have just the right amount of money that people who do not love money have. We have the amount of money that socially responsible and hard-working corners of the community should have, or rather, we will have that much after our next promotion.

But the amount we have now? This is definitely not the sum paid to a lover of money! Lovers of money make much more, they live in larger houses, and may even have two, or at least one more than you or I.

Even if you have a successful career, own a fine house, have enough to indulge in regular vacations, and other such earthly luxuries, it is never the same amount of earthly luxury that typifies those who are truly rich, like the young man in the story, or the Pharisee, or the priest in his temple; or so we tell ourselves.

We aspire to only ever have the exact correct amount of wealth, and others will know how exactly and how correct it is by how easily you stroll through the eye of the needle, neither being nor owning any camels at all.

*Blessed are the poor* indeed. But, even as we smile at such musings, we rejoice in the idea that *the rich are not so*.

Things will not be so easy for the wealthy, the powerful, the bloated, those sick with gelt and drunk on ambition, who breed money for money's sake and spare not a cent to the needy.

Sure, Elon Musk and Trump and Bill Gates give of their plentitude on occasion to this or that person of cause, but it is nothing for them since they have so much. They are no different than the Pharisees of today who give at the temple. They give out of their plenty only so much that it does not affect their bottom line, so that by the loss of a little money, they may buy a little praise from the little guy. But such should not be praised. The Pharisee is not selling, but buying. He is not giving away money, but investing. It is nothing but commerce.

How much of the propaganda of the now past election season was dedicated to arguing which candidate was 'on the side of the rich?' The assumption behind it seems to be that the rich are by nature corrupt and exploitative, the poor by nature virtuous and oppressed.

So it would seem the interpretation of Christ's teaching at the treasury is quite simple, even natural to our understanding. The Pharisee's giving is worthless, as he has plenty to give. The widow's giving is of great value, since she has little.

Christ, far from being esoteric and confusing as He often is, as when He speaks in parables of fallen coins and pearls in fields, *that seeing they might not see, nor in hearing understand*, is teaching quite clearly. It is all about percentages of gross income, not the denomination of the lump sum contributed.

This is something that the progressive income tax has been trying to teach America for quite a long time.

Yet, when I put it this way, it may not settle easy with us, conceiving of our Lord as someone who thinks in such material, or perhaps, financially defensible terms.

It is good if you find this teaching of Christ a little disquieting, but not because it seems too practical. It is because it sounds nothing like our Lord at all, for this is He who rewards the faith of Job with wealth, and burdens the loyal obedience of the prophets with nakedness; who gives to the Israelites the wealth of the

Egyptians, but to the poor promises only the future Kingdom of God.

The rich man He allows to live out his days in his riches, while poor Lazarus remains the companion of dogs and disease until he is consumed.

And even he who invested the ten talents is rewarded with ten more, while he who merely gave back to the master what little he was given is robbed of that little, that the one with the greatest be made greater still.

This is the God, who by the mouth of Moses in the most holy Law of God commanded, '*you shall not show partiality to the poor, nor deference to the great.*' For indeed, '*the Lord is not a respecter of persons.*'

Yet, the strange thing about our Gospel reading today is not that Jesus seems to be applying too much economical analysis to the relative wealth of the Pharisee and the widow. For one, it is probably not the case that Pharisees were necessarily rich at all, for most had simple jobs, and made as little as anyone else. They were simple teachers, so simple that Jesus seems often to be confused with them.

Nor should we then turn to the widow and note how she gave what little she had, for we do we not confess the teachings of the Apostle, that man is not saved by works of the Law, but by grace? Whatever amount she may have given, it cannot be enough to earn any heavenly merit.

As opposed to focusing on the greed of the Rabbis versus the magnanimity of the widows, perhaps we should note a third option very much quietly present in this passage. Both had the option to give nothing. How then is the Pharisee derided for giving less, if he could have just as easily given nothing at all? Why then should a widow be blessed for giving so little when she, quite literally, has nothing less to lose.

Desperation is not synonymous with either goodness or faith. Many a lover has cast a letter in a bottle into the ocean, or left an agonizing voice-message after a regrettable breakup. This may make them more pathetic, but not more godly.

[As for the rich, they are beyond our judgment. We are not told how much they gave, perhaps a lot.]

This passage confuses us somewhat, and our translations do us no favors, for they

render the Greek badly. Christ does not say *'the widow has given everything she has, all she had to live on.'* As if, having lost her last two coins, she is reduced to a beggar.

Rather, it says, *'she gave away everything, her whole life.'*

It is not money that is being sacrificed, but a life, and this is what the Lord has called over His disciples to see, for they too will be called upon to give away what they have, and preach the Gospel to unhearing ears and unwilling hearts, that waking in such a humanity every pride and envy and evil, they too will cast *both body and soul, these two coins, as it were, into the fire, a living sacrifice, their whole life, for Christ's name sake.*

If we were to read on, we would see that immediately after this, the Lord goes on to speak of the destruction of the Temple, the end of the age, the martyrdom of the disciples, and the final judgement. And when He has finished speaking of all these things, the Evangelist will simply say: *'It was now two days before the Passover... and the priests and scribes sought... how to kill him.'*

When the Lord speaks of the widow, He speaks of the disciple's death, for when He speaks of the widow, He speaks of Himself.

Now He wanders, alone and forsaken, across this uncaring world, in search of what He has lost, His first love and spouse, *bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh*; His most beloved creation, Adam and Eve, yet with no avail. Perhaps if they are not able to be found among the living, He has no option but to *descend into hell*, there to find them who were both His first parents, and His first children. Surely in Hell, the Wandering Widow will find what is lost, like a coin fallen from a table, or a pearl buried in a field. So, body and soul, as two mites; these He must *give to the Father, [as to an innkeeper], though it is His whole life, so that once for all He might be offered to bear the sins of many, and save those who die forever.*

But do not be saddened, dear Christian, to see that the Lord *has given away everything, to suffer many things, and endure eternal hell* for you. For truly, I tell you:

*'The jar of flour shall not be spent.'*

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*Preached by Pastor Fields*

*Sermon Texts: 1 Kings 17:8-16, Hebrews 9:24-28, Mark 12:38-44.*