

**Sermon for Proper 27(B)  
Year B**

**[RCL] Psalm 127, (19-22); Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44**

Benjamin Franklin once said, “*a penny saved is a penny earned.*” Yet, despite the sage words from Mr. Franklin, pennies are often readily available; all one has to do is look on city streets - pennies are in abundant supply. People all the world over are happy to get rid of their pennies. Oftentimes, people won’t bother to pick them up when they have fallen.

The penny occupies a peculiar spot on any currency chart. It’s worth next to nothing, but not really. Because of the penny’s peculiarity, it’s difficult to divide. What’s 10% of a penny? Matthew 10:29 proves that one could have purchased two sparrows for one penny in Jesus’ time – “*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny.*”

The term “*a penny for your thoughts*” was ‘coined’ in 1522, with Sir Thomas More’s book, *Four Last Things*. As with most idioms or sayings, no one is exactly sure who first said “a penny for your thoughts” But Sir More was the first to publish it.

Perhaps our widow, in this Gospel story from Mark, should receive some credit for the phrase, “a penny for your thoughts,” as well. Her bold, uninhibited vulnerability to offer all she had to live on was a true sign of sacrifice. In her adherence to Jewish law, she brought her tithe to the treasury – an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Her revolutionary giving posture was to give 90% above the tithe – Now, how’s that for a stewardship model?

If she was anything like the other women portrayed in the Gospel of Mark. We know that this woman embodied faith to approach God boldly, perform loving acts for God, stand as an example of piety to be emulated, and speak truths when others would not. It could be suggested that she was a poor widow, because her late husband was a poor man. So to approach the treasury and pour out and offer all she had to live on, was to say, ‘this is all I got, it isn’t worth much, God, I’ll give you a penny for your thoughts.’

Those thoughts are embedded throughout Scripture. God’s thoughts towards her were that, she could live with the *certainty* that “Before God formed her in the womb God knew her, and before she was born God set her apart; God appointed her” and had a purpose for her. (Jeremiah 1:5)

She could lived with the *guarantee* and gratitude that God had her life all planned out because “surely God knew the plans God had for her, cause God said so, plans for her welfare to prosper her and not for harm, plans to give her a future with hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Those thoughts are true for us as well. We can live in the *assurance* that we can do *all* things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil 4:13). And we can live with the *knowledge* that nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37).

Knowing the thoughts God has towards us is important to carrying out our ministry on this earth.

Our sister in this story pushed passed the shame of being a struggling widow. She broke open the doors that would have said your two cents aren’t enough; pennies cannot do a thing. She paid no attention to

the offerings others had in comparison to her own. She understood there wasn't a thing she could do, but by giving all she had to God that could change.

Similar to American art teacher and musician Judson W. Van DeVenter who penned the lyrics for the Christian hymn 'I Surrender All.' DeVenter said "For some time, I had struggled between developing my talents in the field of art and going into full-time evangelistic work. At last the pivotal hour of my life came, and I surrendered all. A new day was ushered into my life."

Once those two coins hit the bottom of the treasury it ushered a new day, a new season in the life of the widow, because of her surrender, sacrifice, and sacramental giving.

Worship is essentially our response to God's love, generosity and graciousness. Worship edifies our souls, and God delights in our worship. Remember our sister from Canaan whose daughter was tormented by a demon? When she went to Jesus and his disciples, Jesus didn't even speak to her at first. His disciples tried to quiet her and send her away. It's not until she bowed down and worshipped Jesus that Jesus responded to her. Our worship gets God's attention. (Matthew 15:21-28)

Giving is an act of worship. The widow's giving, and in our giving, we are worshipping God. Her selfless act of vulnerability, her posture of worship got Jesus' attention. The Gospel states, once she gives all she had to live on, Jesus called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury." Her worship received Jesus' attention.

She gave all that she had to live on, so that the work of God's kingdom could be done. Prior to getting Jesus' attention, Jesus is telling his disciples about the pitfalls of "Scribe-like" behavior and cautions them to beware! To be clear, "Scribe-like" giving (not "Scribe-like" behavior) is important and helpful to the growth of the Church. When we give from a place of sacrifice and surrender, this is our devotion to God. God looks at the heart and wants for us to be able to trust God with all that we have for what we have are gifts from God.

Rev. Charles Cloughen, Jr. states in his book, *One Minute Stewardship Sermons*, that 'God is generous, giving, loving, forgiving, and gracious. God desires our loving response to His generosity.' The oxymoron here is that God is generous even in our scarcity. Most often our loving response is not sacrificial giving similar to that of the widow. Out of her poverty she gave and took the huge risk of not being able to afford to live. One might look at her and begin finger wagging and calling her less than smart. How will she live, if she gave all she had to live on *to God*? It doesn't make much sense. In today's society that kind of giving may be frowned upon tremendously. Even sacrificial giving may be shunned because of the thrill of the accumulation of material possession in our society. But, this widow understood giving to God was a sure way for a substantial return on her investment.

Some biblical scholars believe however that her gift presaged Jesus' own surrender and sacrifice to God's will for His life. In this Gospel, our poor widowed sister reflected Jesus' behavior, "though he was rich, yet for (our) sake became poor, so that by his poverty (we) might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Anyone can give out of their' abundance and excess, but it takes a true believer to give out of his or her poverty. Sacrificing and surrendering of all that she had, this poor widow was able to attain all she needed to live on and her heart sang the words of Van DeVenter's Hymn:

All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust him,  
In his presence daily live.

*Refrain:*

I surrender all,  
I surrender all,  
All to thee, my blessed Savior,  
I surrender all.

AMEN.

### **For reference and further study**

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