***ALL IN!***

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Texts: Mark 12:38-44 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9

 On the wall of a hallway in Mary Baldwin’s athletic center is a sign with bold green block letters proclaiming: WE ARE ALL IN! This is not an update on an ongoing student poker game; it is a motto for the Fighting’ Squirrels’ athletic programs, a declaration of dedication and commitment to the coming season. Being ALL IN means practicing hard and playing hard and doing whatever it takes to play well – not just as individuals, but as a team. It is the same motto claimed by the Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center, whose website bears that same message – WE ARE ALL IN – followed by this invitation:

*Show your support to someone battling cancer. Share your words of encouragement by uploading your own video. Let a cancer fighter know that they are not facing this alone. We are all in.*

At the Anderson Center that ALL IN message is about mutual support, about sharing ownership of what too often may seem like an individual battle. WE ARE ALL IN declares WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER! YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

 Those words which work so well for the Fighting Squirrels and the Anderson Clinic could be the motto for this Dedication Sunday as well. WE ARE ALL IN is both a statement of our shared calling to share our gifts in gratitude for God’s blessings – it is something we do together as a Covenant family – but it is also an affirmation that we dedicate not just a portion of our lives to God, but all of our lives – heart, soul, mind and strength. WE ARE ALL IN because GOD IS ALL IN for us – that is what the crucifixion and resurrection are all about – God’s love for the world that knows no bounds. What does ALL IN look like for us? It looks like the widow at the temple who threw in her two copper coins. On a busy day in a busy place she slips into the temple, drops her pittance of a gift into the treasury, and slips out again unnoticed by all – or almost all. There is nothing special about her, nothing worthy of note or notice. We don’t know her name or her face. We know only what she left behind – two copper coins worth less than a penny. It’s not much of a gift, not much of a legacy. In the course of human history it is an insignificant moment and an insignificant sum. Yet for two thousand years the eyes of the Christian world have taken note of that woman and her gift: two copper coins – a widow’s mite.

The world has taken note because Jesus took note. Sitting opposite the treasury with eager disciples gathered all around him, Jesus recognized the significance of the poor widow’s gift. Just as he recognized the touch of the hemorrhaging woman in the midst of the crowd, just as he found Zacchaeus sitting in the tree, Jesus found someone special, something holy, in the midst of the routine. As he sat there watching people drop their coins into the treasury, he says to his disciples,

“Did you see that? That woman – the poor widow walking away! She just dropped two copper coins into the treasury.”

The disciples glance at one another and then at Jesus without a clue as to what he is talking about. People have been dropping offerings in there all day. So what?

 “Her gift,” says Jesus, “is greater than the gifts of the wealthy folks

who preceded her. Her two copper coins are worth more than

the silver and gold of the rich, for the rich gave out of their

excess but she gave all she had. Those coins were not her

spending money, but her living, her life. *Blessed are the poor*

*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Blessed is she.”

 For two thousand years that poor widow’s mite has stood in testimony to faithfulness and faithful giving. It’s not the amount of the gift, but the heart of the giver that seems to matter to God. Two copper coins from the hand of a poor widow become more valuable than silver and gold from the hands of wealthy donors. “A bone to the dog is not charity,” says Jack London. “Charity is the bone shared with the dog, when you are just as hungry as the dog.”

 From the little she had the poor widow gave two copper coins for God’s use. Why? Jesus seems to imply that it is because God had priority in her life. She trusted God to care for her and placed her gift to God above her own needs. By her gift, she made tangible that Great Commandment Jesus had quoted only moments before, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” In her gift, the poor widow held nothing back. She gave her all. “For what we get, we can make a living,” says Arthur Ashe. “What we give, however, makes a life.”

 The irony is that the widow’s mite comes on the heels of Jesus’ warning about the scribes. While she willingly and innocuously gave all she had for God’s use, the scribes demanded all they could get for themselves and abused what was given them by the poor widow and rich folk alike. The scribes demanded attention in their flowing robes,

they demanded respect from those in the marketplace,

they demanded the best seats in the synagogues,

they demanded places of honor at the banquets.

They misused what was entrusted to them and took advantage of the very widows who they were to protect. They sought praise for their long-winded prayers. The scribes were more concerned with their own welfare than with the welfare of the poor; they sought glory for themselves instead of glory for God. “Beware the scribes!” warns Jesus.

 The news is full of stories of 21st century scribes who have abused their positions by using poor widows’ gifts for air-conditioned doghouses, private jets, luxurious apartments, and a host of other extravagances. “Beware of them!” warns Jesus. But his words about the scribes are words of warning for us as well. What is given for God’s work as the church in this place is held by us in sacred trust to be used, and not abused, for God’s glory, to enable us to answer God’s call as we live into our mission statement:

STRIVING TO BE FAITHFUL DISCIPLES OF CHRIST:

WORSHIPING WITH JOY, GROWING IN FAITH, SERVING IN LOVE

All that we do should in some way fulfill that mission, for we are called to be faithful, not only as individuals in our giving, but also as the church in our use of the gifts entrusted to our care. Thankfully, those who have preceded us in this place have been good stewards of God’s good gifts. Now it is our turn, our responsibility, to be faithful stewards of all the gifts with which we have been blessed. It is a responsibility we share as the church, just as we bear individual responsibility for our giving.

 Between the scribes of whom we are to beware and the blessed widow who gave two copper coins are the rich folks who gave from their abundance. They are not chastised, nor are they blessed. They give to the temple what they feel they can afford once they’ve paid for what they need and want for themselves. Their gifts come from their leftovers. They’ve paid the mortgage, made their new car payments, planned their vacations, bought football season tickets, ordered new living room furniture, made their IRA contributions, and now bring their gifts to God. In their actions are glimpses of that rich man who wanted from Jesus assurance of salvation, but could not give up his riches to follow.

 Where do you fall on that continuum from the poor widow on one end to the scribes on the other? On one extreme is poverty and humility, on the other end is power and arrogance. One extreme is self-giving; the other is self-serving. One extreme testifies to faithfulness, the other to selfishness. Where are you in your giving and living between the scribes and the poor widow?

 None of us want to be with the scribes. But truth be known we’re not all that anxious to join the poor widow at the other end of the spectrum if it means giving away all we have. I suspect that most of us find more comfort in the middle among the rich folks than among either extreme. *Moderation in all things* seems a good motto. So why not moderation in giving as well? After all, some of the rich folks put in large sums, according to Jesus. That’s a good thing, certainly better than being destitute and dependent upon others for support. Surely God doesn’t want us to be destitute! Yet it is the poor widow who is commended; the widow’s mite that is the greater gift. What then does God want from us?

 *Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. No commandment is greater than these!* Jesus doesn’t get much clearer than that great commandment. It is a command to love fully and concretely, not just in theory but in practice. It doesn’t get much more concrete for us than the widow’s mite. Your gifts, says Jesus, should reflect the love of God that is in you – heart, soul, mind, and strength. You can’t love God with all that you are and withhold your money or your talents or your time. You can’t love God with just part of your life – you have to be ALL IN! If you are putting anything ahead of your love of God and neighbor, then you are coming up short – regardless of the size of your gift.

 Consider your gift this Dedication Sunday. What does your pledge say about your love for God? What priorities are reflected in what you give and in what you don’t give? Is it a gift from the heart of your life or from the fringes? Only you and God will know, but do not think that means that only you will know. God too will see and know as surely as Jesus saw the woman drop those two copper coins into the treasury.

 The story is told of an African boy who brought a Christmas gift to his teacher – a superb seashell. The teacher marveled at the beauty of it and asked the boy where he had found it. He said such shells could only be found at a beach several miles away. Hearing this, the teacher responded, “Oh, you shouldn’t have gone so far for a gift for me.” “But,” said the boy, “the long walk was part of the gift.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

 Gifts come in various shapes and sizes. Two copper coins, a seashell, a long walk. Those gifts don’t amount to much in the world’s view, but they are precious in God’s sight when they come from the heart. Your gift this day is that kind of gift, a gift of your time, talents, and resources – a gift of your life that says something about how great the Great Commandment is for you. It is a spiritual issue more than a financial one – a question less of money than of faithfulness. It is your response to God’s question to you: Are you all in – for me? What do you say? Amen

1. Jo Carr and Donna Cash quoted by John C. Peterson in *The Pastor’s Pen*, July 23, 1986 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)