

PILGRIM CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
The Rev. John Tamilio III, Senior Minister

Pentecost XXIII — Sunday, November 8, 2009  
Sermon: “Generations of Faithful Stewards”

Gospel Lesson: Mark 12:38-44

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I

I was driving my youngest child (Thomas) to school the other day on my way into the office. You know those hooks in the back of your car that you can hang shirts or dry cleaning on? Well, I hung my sports coat on one of those hooks just as Thomas was getting in on the other side. Thomas looked at them and then he looked at me and said, “Daddy, I didn’t know that you have hookers in your car!” I explained to Thomas that they are called “hooks” not “hookers.” I could just picture him going into his first grade class and telling his teacher and friends, “Daddy drove me to school today. He had hookers in the backseat. By the way, my Daddy is a minister.”

*Out of the mouths of babes.*

We laugh at stories such as this, because they are cute — and we laugh because we all know the stigma that is associated with prostitutes. They are marginalized in our society, just as they were in Jesus’ day. In the Gospels they are the same as widows, orphans, sinners, tax collectors, and the sick. They are social pariahs — misfits.

The thing about social pariahs is that we hold them at a distance, because we do not want to offer them anything, and we certainly do not want anything from them. Yet it is often those who live on the margins who have the most to teach us. There are many lessons that we can glean from those that the Church and society at large has cast to the corners.

## 2.

- Think of the homeless veteran with the cardboard sign asking for spare change.
- Think of the people who stand in line at our food pantry each Tuesday and Thursday. (That line is growing longer and longer each week, by the way.)
- Think of the people without health insurance seeking care at the local clinic.
- Think of the widow.

You know who I am talking about, don't you? The main character in this morning's Gospel Lesson.

## II

On one level, the story of The Widow's Mite is about stewardship, which is the perfect theme for today. On the other hand, the widow offers a challenge to all of us and our dedication to Pilgrim.

*First — her story.*

The poor widow puts two copper coins into the Temple treasury. Her offering did not compare to the extravagant sums that the rich people were giving. They know that, which is why they sit opposite her. Are they judging her and her paltry gift? Let's face it: we need wealthy people to run the church. We need big gifts. How much are we going to be able to do with two copper coins! That is not going to pay utility bills, staff salaries, or fund outreach projects.

But Jesus turns the table on our understanding of generosity.

The widow actually gave the most, because she offered *everything* she had. So we could argue that *percentage* wise — looking at the wealth-to-gift ratio — the widow gave more than everyone...and that is the way that we usually we interpret this passage.

But there's something else going on here. How was this poor widow, who had no assistance from anybody, going to survive if she gave *everything* she had to the Temple? Isn't that being irresponsible? How was she going to provide for herself? Who was going to take care of her? Maybe the widow heard Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, when he said "strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness,

and all these things will be given to you as well.” Maybe she believed those words. Maybe she truly believed that if she offered all that she had to God, she wouldn’t need anything else because God would take care of her. Maybe she believed that God would fulfill her every need as Jesus promised.

### III

So what is the challenge to Pilgrim? I think the widow is speaking loud and clear to us. If she were here right now, I think that she would say, “Offer all that you have and all that you are to God and God will provide. God will take care of you. Yes, I know that these are tough economic times, but they do not compare to first century Palestine. Those were *really* tough times. It isn’t the large gift that you offer that illustrates your faithfulness. It is the percentage. If you offer everything, then you have to rely on God, because you have nothing else.”

Now do not worry. My charge to you today is not for you to offer *everything you own* to Pilgrim (although we will accept such a gift if you want to make it). My charge to you, as we continue on our “Generations of Faithful Stewards” campaign, is for you to reflect upon your overall dedication to Pilgrim. Think about this church for a moment. Why is Pilgrim your spiritual home? What is it that you find here that you cannot find anywhere else? Now we all have a different Pilgrim story and, therefore, a different answer to this question. Some of us love Pilgrim because it is a very *welcoming* church. Some of us love Pilgrim because of our commitment to *mission*. Some of us love Pilgrim because we made our closest *friends* here. There are many different answers. When you boil it all down, though, all these answers have a single, common denominator: *Pilgrim has enabled us to experience the grace of God in a profound way*. Once you experience the grace of God, you are not the same. It changes your life and your priorities.

What do we offer to God in return for such blessings? Two and a half percent? Ten percent? Everything? The history of Pilgrim is one in which people offered everything to make this a place where the grace of God is so tangible you can taste it. And now, they have passed the torch to us. They are calling to us from history saying, “Take up the mantle and run with it. We offered everything to make Pilgrim what it is. It is your turn to do the same.”

4.

As you make your fiscal pledge to Pilgrim as we prepare our 2010 budget, ask yourselves if your gift is a reflection of not only your thankfulness to Pilgrim, but also ask yourself if it reflects your total reliance on God. If not, then we need to read the Widow's story again...and we need to join our hearts with hers. Amen.