

"With Mite of Ours"

Text: Mark 12:41-44

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ³⁴ For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? ³⁵ Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? ³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:33-36)

Dear Fellow Saints – those who have been declared to be sin-free by a just and holy God, who based his immutable declaration solely on the goodness of his Son, Jesus Christ:

As we continue to celebrate the Reformation and the uniquely Christian *redirection* it returned to us (looking to Christ, rather than to ourselves for our sin payment) consider first this morning one of the verses of that most famous Lutheran hymn – a Mighty Fortress:

*With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected
But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord
And there's none other God; He holds the field forever.*

Note, again, the emphasis on direction. Looking to ourselves and our own strength or goodness, nothing at all can be accomplished against sin, death, and Satan. Our loss was certain. Looking, on the other hand, to Jesus, the battle against sin, death, and Satan is already won.

Still for some reason we are continually drawn back to, and enticed by, the foolishly damning notion that our own good works play some sort of role in the payment for our sins. Our text for this morning – the account of the Widow's Mite (or penny) – provides the perfect opportunity to restudy something as simple as the role of our church contributions in our justification and salvation. Our study this morning will center on the theme: *With Mite of Ours Can Naught Be Done*, and we will find that this paraphrase of a line in Luther's famous hymn verse is, at the same time, both absolutely right and absolutely wrong. Our study will be based on the Word of God found recorded in the 12th Chapter of Mark's Gospel:

^{ESV} **Mark 12:41-44** *And he (Jesus) sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his*

disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

This is God's Word. In preparation to be filled and strengthened by a study of these words, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

The words of our text for this morning are probably very familiar to you. Many Christians have heard from little on about "the widow's mite." But what did it *mean* to you? What does it mean to you *now, today*? This is one of those rather simple accounts whose intended meaning and application is nonetheless inexplicably elusive. In other words, we get it, but we don't get it.

To understand first what this account should *not* tell us, take a moment to look at this morning's bulletin cover. I chose this particular image not because I consider it an accurate artist's rendition but because I think it is the single *worst* impression I have ever seen. A picture may tell a thousand words, but those thousand words aren't always accurate. Let's start with Jesus. First, he didn't walk about with a halo. That would have been hard for his enemies to explain away. Second, our text says that he was seated. Not so in the picture. Admittedly a fairly minor point, but why not at least make the picture accurate to what we are told in God's Word. Far more fanciful is the depiction of the widow herself. Hard to imagine that a woman who has literally one penny to her name would be immaculately clean and well-dressed. We are not told her age, but it is much more likely that she was old. We are also not told that she had children with her. The woman in the picture has four, including a dejected-looking boy dressed in what for all the world looks like cargo pants and a Calvin Kline polo. He does not look at all happy with what mom is doing. The girls, who also do not look happy, are dressed like they are ready to walk down the aisle at an ancient Jewish fashion show. No one looks all that pleased with what mom is doing – dropping their last penny into the offering box next to the fresh bouquet of flowers – including mom herself.

Why be so hard on an artist's impression? Again, because pictures not only teach, they can teach error – and in more ways than just visually. What to you, for example, is the intended takeaway from this particular image? Here's a clue: it's from the website of a church that demands a tithe from its members. The apparent message is that members have

to give, even if it means giving their last penny, even if it means that their children have to go hungry and, more to the point, even if they don't want to.

The reality is that this Bible account isn't really about money at all, it is about the Christian heart. What then *should* the picture look like? More than likely an older woman in tattered clothes, but the real issue would be her expression – not dejection, not sorrow, not desperation, but joy and contentment at the fact that she had something she could give to her Lord. Why joy and contentment, rather than dejection, sorrow, or desperation? Mostly because Jesus himself *praised* her, and in 2 Corinthians 9:7 we are told, **“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”** The Bible truth concerning cheerful Christian giving looks nothing at all like the picture on our bulletin cover. The artist missed completely the fact that this text is *not about money*. It's all about joy and confidence in the heart of his children.

The fact that we know nothing at all about what happened to the widow after she gave all that she had bears this out. This isn't about leveraging money out of members, as in *“Give sacrificially and God will give you more.”* Again, only silence as to what happened to the woman. Most Christians simply refuse to believe that anything bad could have happened to her, especially after her selfless act of generosity was commended by Jesus himself. In fact most would probably paint a very satisfying "happily ever after" picture, confident that she lived out the rest of her days in relative comfort, blessed miraculously by God himself in much the same way that the widow's bin of flour and jar of oil never ran dry as long as the drought lasted in Israel and she fed the Prophet Elijah. That's grossly unfair to the text. It's manipulating the text to say what it does not: *give lavishly and you will live happily ever after.*

What Jesus praises in our text is the condition of the widow's heart. The question we need to ask ourselves is how the widow could possibly be filled with joy when she literally just gave all that she had as a contribution to the church. It is in that sense that our theme rings true: *With mite of ours can naught be done*. It is disturbing that so many read this text and imagine that this woman's gift had some sort of bearing on the payment for her sins. How scandalous, how blasphemous, to imagine that anyone could buy God's forgiveness, that human beings could ever purchase that which only the innocent blood of Jesus Christ could earn. In fact if anyone tries to pay for the gift of forgiveness, he ruins it. He destroys it entirely.

Christians can be filled with joy no matter what their earthly circumstances because they know that though they could never buy God's love with their

offerings, they don't have to. It has already been earned in full by our Savior Jesus. God has already declared our sin debt to have been paid in full by his Son. Our offerings have nothing at all to do with our justification. God has already declared us innocent.

That's one side of our theme – the true side. *With mite of ours can naught be done* is absolutely true in connection with our justification. Our money could never buy our forgiveness. God does not love and forgive us only when we contribute to his Church. He does not love us more if we give more.

Yet how is that same statement false? In other words, how is *“with mite of ours can naught be done”* not true?

God does not need our money, since he can certainly accomplish whatever he wants to accomplish without us. He could turn the leaves on our trees to gold if he chose to do so (which would arguably improve the turnout for our fall workdays). What he offers us in connection with our church contributions is a means to participate in *his* holy work, which, when the heart is right, is a source of great joy for the child of God.

If that Bible truth that *“God does not need our money to accomplish his holy will”* fills your heart with joy that you can now spend more, or even all, on yourself, then know that you have missed the point of the text. Your heart needs work. Remember, Jesus praised the woman's heart and dedication.

God can and does use the trusting, willing offerings of his people to accomplish great things. With mites from his people (whether that "mite" is one dollar or one million dollars) God can and will supply the blessings necessary to preserve and advance the gospel ministry, here and abroad. Nothing in all creation is more important than the kingdom work he has given us to do.

God grant each of us then the strength of faith and the rock-solid trust necessary to cast ourselves recklessly upon him and his good promises. God grant us the wisdom to put all earthly wealth in its place – literally and spiritually – and to value that which he himself values above all else. This has been the example of the saints that went before – the heroes of the Christian faith who were given the grace to walk in trust and faith as God's chosen people. This is the trust and the faith for which we pray, so help us God. Amen.

ESV **Micah 6:6-8** "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" ⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

ESV **Acts 6:1-7** Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

ESV **Mark 12:41-44** And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."



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The 24th Sunday after Pentecost – November 3, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 463 (Stanzas 1-2, 4-6) (Red Hymnal)

"For All the Saints"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Micah 6:6-8) Christians of all ages have struggled to rightly understand and rightly teach the proper relationship between our salvation (which is earned by Christ and given to us freely) and our own good works (which serve as our natural "thank you" for what our God has done for us and given to us). So our first lesson teaches us that there is nothing we can do to earn God's favor, while also reminding us of the will of God for our lives here on earth. Obedience is how Christians seek to thank our God.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 23 (Supplement Page 36)

The New Testament Lesson: (Acts 6:1-7) Our second lesson ties the Old Testament Lesson to the sermon text – all of which is wrapped in the message of the Reformation and All Saints Sunday. The point here is that God has given specific gifts to all of his children. Every one of those gifts has tremendous value, and God's Church is left the poorer whenever and wherever His gifts are not put to good use.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 616 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Forever with the Lord"

The Sermon – Text: Mark 12:41-44 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"With Mite of Ours Can Naught Be Done"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 437 (Red Hymnal)

"Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode"

The Prayers of the Day followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 616 (Stanzas 6-8) (Red Hymnal)

"Forever with the Lord"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (33) Average (32)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-6:00 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Frank Gantt is considering the call to Faith of Manchester, MO. Teacher Collette Krause (Trinity of Watertown) has announced her retirement from the teaching ministry at the end of the current school year. Electronic copies of the Proceedings of this summer's CLC Convention are now available. See Pastor Roehl for information on how to download a copy for yourself.

Updated Contact Sheet – We are in the process of our annual Member Contact Sheet update. Please check the sheet on the mailbox table and make any necessary corrections or additions.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet tomorrow evening at 6:00 pm.

Allison Loeb Baby Shower – A baby shower is planned for Allison Loeb this afternoon, November 3rd at 1:00 pm. Please see the announcement on the bulletin board for more information.

Christmas Flower Order – There is a sign-up sheet on the mailbox table for our annual Christmas flower order. Please address any questions to Sandy Roehl.

Usher/Cleaning List – The 2025 Usher/Cleaner schedule is being prepared. Please pass along any necessary changes to Phil Pfennig.