

Call to Worship Luke 10:25-28 (Common English Version)

Jesus Christ opens our eyes to see things that without his gracious healing we would never see.

Jesus, focus our attention on worship and on the people who we tend to overlook. Help us to see what you see.

To be a Christian, a follower of Jesus, is a way of seeing.

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Prayer of Invocation

Gracious God, your gifts to us are without number.

You withhold no good thing from those who love you, but shower us with blessings – rich, unearned, undeserved blessings. And as we gather here to worship in the name of Jesus, we ask that the realization of your lavish love will touch our minds and hearts anew. May we become not only willing, but eager to offer ourselves, our resources, our 'all' to Jesus and his ongoing mission of healing and compassion in this world. Amen.

The Word Mark 12:38-44 (Common English Bible)

As he was teaching, he said, "Watch out for the legal experts. They like to walk around in long robes. They want to be greeted with honor in the markets. They long for places of honor in the synagogues and at banquets.

They are the ones who cheat widows out of their homes, and to show off they say long prayers. They will be judged most harshly."

Jesus sat across from the collection box for the temple treasury and observed how the crowd gave their money. Many rich people were throwing in lots of money. One poor widow came forward and put in two small copper coins worth a penny.

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than everyone who's been putting money in the treasury. All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had, even what she needed to live on."

Living the Word

I am one of those people who will stoop to pick up a penny. Not because I am so poor, but because I can't understand why anyone would drop it and leave it. Friday I found one on the floor at the Salvation Army Thrift Store. I bent over and picked it up and considered putting it in my pocket, as it seemed such a small token to offer in the little red bucket. But the bucket didn't seem to mind as it jangled when it hit the other change within.

Is it worth my time to pick up the penny? Someone figured out if you take more than 6 seconds to pick up that penny then you are not even earning minimum wage. On the other hand it costs 1.4 cents to produce another one. When you save pennies it hurts the economy because it costs more to produce the new ones.

People don't like dealing with pennies. If there is a little dish next to a cash register where people are buying things, they'll toss in their pennies so that they don't have to carry them in a pocket or purse. Someone has figured out that billions of dollars worth of pennies have just disappeared. People have thrown them away, put them in jars, thrown them in the back of drawers, and forgotten about them. How would you like to be a penny that is forgotten?

But pennies are worth something, and they add up. One hundred pennies makes a dollar. How many of you would stoop to pick up a dollar off the sidewalk? The fact is, that pennies are worth something and if we put them together we could continue to do God's work. I decided to go into my change jar and bring my pennies.

Just for fun I counted them and I had 501 of them - \$5.01. Well it's something to give! I took pennies to the bank and I have 1 penny and a \$5 for the Food Shelf jar, but, this morning during the offering time we will do a second offering for all of those who are trying to recover from Hurricane Matthew, so I am matching the change with \$5.01 for that offering.

Jesus knew about the value of small coins. In today's Scripture passage Jesus and his friends were looking at the huge temple. It was one of the great wonders of the world. People would come and just stand and stare. There was a place for those who wanted to support the work of the temple to put their money.

One day while Jesus and his friends were watching people throw in huge gifts of money so that others would be impressed and think well about them, they saw a poor widow come up very quietly and put in two small copper coins, worth less than a penny. No one cheered for her gift. No one made a big deal about it. But Jesus told everyone that the woman had given more than anyone else, because the others only gave a part of what they owned, but she gave all she had.

What was Jesus trying to say exactly? Listen and see if you can agree with this statement: "We recognize we are among the rich in comparison with so many of God's human family who suffer in poverty. We participate in a society that worships the little g, 'god' called 'money.' While we profess other values, we admit we are not immune to the power it exerts in our lives.

Because of this we become cautious and self-protective in any giving for the sake of others, rather than being free and generous. Our materialistic ways are born of our fearful, selfish hearts; and our judgments on others." You don't have to agree, but admit it, do those words sting just a little?

Seems like every Fall, in the church we talk about money. We worry if we will have enough to pay all of the year end bills and still have enough to start the next year. So, can we look at this week's scripture and let it not be about money, but about our commitment, year round to God. We began this in September with our Think Greater campaign and these last couple of weeks we asked what your commitments would be to the church.

Many of you returned a card with your commitments to pray and be present and serve and give and some of you were even brave enough to check witness for the church. Even though I think we need to understand witnessing better, so we can see that in many ways our Christian example is our witness. Many of you are witnesses and didn't even realize it...

Quick commercial: There is still time to turn in a Commitment Card, you don't have to be a member to commit yourself to the church in some way. So far, as of Thursday, we had financial commitments higher as last year's initial total. Not enough to cover the budget, but this is still a very good thing!

So let's take another look at this story, without focusing on the money part. The widow realized that God is a God of boundless abundance and that in God all things come into being and all resources find their original source. With consideration, we begin to consider that we are focused on our feelings of the absence of our abundance and our desire to have more of all of life... We are striving to have more of everything so we can feel secure and successful in this life.

If we look back, some of us might see how we have worried about investments and worried as to how to safeguard our assets or increase our holdings, setting aside the amount of our attention and energy that belongs to God and to the ministries to which God has called us, as we are to care for the world.

We need to pray about our priorities, that our lives can mirror a woman who could quietly give her all, not begrudgingly, but willingly, out of her joy for whatever was ahead. We really need to build our trust in God's leading and become more dependent on that direction.

Picture this: the comparison that is drawn for us; the scribes in their long robes, with their titles and privileges; best seats in the house; saying long public prayers after they have cheated widows out of their homes. If this was a melodrama we would boo and hiss at these guys. They wanted to be known for their importance – boo, hiss. The poor widow came to put money in the offering and dropped coins worth one penny. Giving what she had. Give her a yeah!

Do you see the contrast of these two scenes? It is a trust issue: the scribes depended on themselves and others for their blessings. The widow gave what she had, depending on God's grace for her blessings. A trust issue; it is about who you depend on and what you do with the gifts that you are given. Very few of that day had the possibility for education, learning to read and write like the scribes, they were given those gifts to use them for God's purpose. What did the widow have for gifts? She gave it all.

Jesus said to the disciples and to a large crowd that had gathered: *"From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded."* Luke 12:48 The same verse from The Message version reads this way: *"Great gifts mean great responsibilities; greater gifts, greater responsibilities!"*

Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this for us or for everyone?" What do you think? Was this just for those original 12 disciples? Or for the crowd he faced that day? Or for us?

At funerals and memorial services I often look for what gifts the deceased has shared during their lives – teaching others, baking for the family, always having a smile ready... and I tell those present that this is the legacy they leave for all who are still here. This widow's gift was, that she was willing to give all that she had, which showed her trust and love for God and her legacy is recorded here in the Bible for everyone throughout history to know. That is impressive...

We are each put in a place and time, given a purpose. Can we be content with the opportunities before each of us? The Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church meet two times each year from all over the world. Though they usually meet in the US, five years ago this week, they met in Africa.

Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa and an international symbol of human rights, and his wife, former Mozambique Education Minister Gracia Machel, surprised the bishops with their appearance at dinner on Sunday. Both Mandela and Machel have deep Methodist Roots. Mandela was educated in a Methodist School in South Africa.

Machel is a United Methodist and attended a Methodist School in Mozambique. Calling herself a child of the Methodist Church, she told the Council of Bishops that it was the teachings of the church that led her to see that she, a girl living in poverty, could become educated and a leader. She spoke of the empowerment that those schools encouraged.

Mandela told the Bishops: "People should be recognized for the work they do and not for who they are or where they come from." God makes us who we are and where we come from – we decide what we will do with that...parade it in front of others – or give it back to God – no matter what size the gift is.

In less than a month is Veteran's Day. In 1989 Billy Ray Cyrus wrote a song for a Veteran he met entitled "Some Give All." He sings of how every military person gives some, some give their all – as in their lives. Then it isn't a matter of everyone giving everything, but the willingness to give everything if it is needed.

I am pretty sure that even with noble hearts not everyone enters military service with the intent to die, but somewhere along in the training it must occur to each of them what they have put on the line by joining. I have never served in the military, but I have two sons who have risked their life to serve their country in Iraq.

I am proud of them both, but at one point I thought it was very unfair of them to risk the life that I had given them without my consent. For each of them I had to surrender my hold, to the one who was truly their

Creator, in order for them to use their gifts. I have had a lot of long conversations with God about whose day it is to watch over them. I now know that as our children grow up, we need to grow up as well.

God gave the costliest gifts to the world in Jesus Christ. Through Christ our forgiveness is assured, giving everything was perfected, love was brought to the front and good news was given to those who were without it. Our loving and giving is meager and measured compared to God's, whose love is unconditional and unmeasured, and abundant.

Still we want to calculate and reason in our minds how much we can love without risking hurt, how much we can surrender without making total commitment, how much we can give to others and still afford the comforts that we desire, how much we can humble ourselves and still retain control, and how much we can serve and still have the time we want for our own pursuits and pleasures.

We need to break free from our past careful, controlled expressions of love, be outrageously daring for Christ's sake. So here is the real kicker...God loves us either way; the gifts to us are without number. God withholds no good thing from those who love God, and instead showers us with blessings. Can we become not only willing, but eager to offer ourselves, our resources, our 'all' to Jesus and his ongoing mission of healing and compassion in this world?

God has shown us the way in the life of Jesus. Yet our nature causes us to hold back. We often choose to bury our talents rather than use them and in that we expose our lack of faith and our doubting that God will tend to our future as it has been promised. We doubt that we will truly find ourselves by losing ourselves in loving service to each other. Yet we have committed ourselves to following Jesus, to extravagant loving in Christ's name, and that will be enough.

So once again I invite you this week to "Think Greater!" Knowing that with God, nothing is too small to give of yourself...Did you know that it also costs more to produce a nickel than 5 cents? So for the economy, next week I will sort out the nickels in my jar and bring them in for the noisy can offering to those who may have more need, than I.