

For Your Glory: Sacrificial Giving

Week 5 - Beyond

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

Pretty exciting announcements. Also, I hate when people say, hey, Mandy's got this great message for you. It's like so much pressure. It's like, what if it's not good? So one of the very hardest things for us to do is letting go, maybe letting go of good sermons, right? Of always having to have something prepared.

Letting go of control. That's hard to do. Letting go of security. Letting go of the idea that we have to figure out everything on our own. So this is especially true when it comes to giving. We want to be generous people, right? For some of us, we want to be like Mr. Beast. Strive for the young people and for maybe the older people.

We want to be like Warren Buffett, right? Known for just, being generous. But we also worry. We worry when we think about being generous. Will I have enough? What if something unmixed, expected comes? What if I give and then I regret it later? If we're honest, sometimes when we let go. Things get worse. Have you ever been there?

Right. You. You finally take a step of faith, and suddenly the washing machine breaks down. And we. We commit to giving more. And then an unexpected bill arrives. We trust God with our finances, but things don't instantly get easier. So what do we do? We respond by we hold back. We. We tighten our grip. We tell ourselves, well, maybe when, maybe when I get a raise.

Maybe when I pay off that bill, maybe when I feel more secure. Then I can be generous. So true story. A couple weeks after Tom and I committed to the beyond campaign, so we put in our commitment to what that was going to look like over the next three years. A couple weeks after this, our car broke down.

Now, the amount that we committed was more than what we would normally spend on a used car, and we had already felt that we were stretching ourselves a bit, giving above and beyond our ties to this, this campaign. And then suddenly now we have this unexpected expense. We had also just we're in the stages of planning a trip to Utah.

And so now we have the unexpected of expense of getting a new car and an upcoming trip, and then this commitment that we've made to the church. And for a while we were nervous. We said, what are we doing? Are we able going to be able to do all the things that we have said, or we feel like we needed to do?

So, long story short, we ended up finding a used car for a reasonable, reasonable price. I don't know how in this this time of, day, but we did. We shifted some money around, and for

the little we got in for our trading, we were able to pay for that car without a loan, which is important to us.

We did end up going on that trip to Utah, but that trip look looked a little bit different than we had planned. So we cut our budget for that trip. We packed sandwiches and meals and snacks, and we didn't go out to eat every day. We wanted to stay at some really cool hot springs resorts that were down there.

We had the opportunity to do that in Santa Fe a couple of years ago, and that was our plan. But instead we decided to stay in some budget friendly hotels and the budget friendly hotel that Tom chose, who that was, that was a cheap one. There was. But you know what? You know what? It was still one of the best trips that we have ever taken.

And we saw God's creation in a whole new way. We experienced God through that trip, even if we had to adjust. So we are still able to give what we had planned. That's still the plan. And as I was preparing for this message and thinking about this story, I walked, back from the bathroom on the way through the hall.

And, you know, the DC is where our we, our kids are. And this picture was was there at the table. And it says God is generous. And it's this awesome picture of a mountain. And it's an amazing, loss, similar to what we saw when we drove through Utah, in Colorado. And then I picked up this other sheet that was on the table that the kids, for the parents of what the kids are learning.

And here's what their they've been learning over the past four weeks. First of all, God is generous. And then week two, God is generous to me. And then week three I am generous. And then week four, we are generous. We are generous together. We have the power to do things. God is generous. That's what we're teaching our children.

And so hopefully when they're older, they won't have so much difficulty letting go like we do. Because the problem is, is when we try to control everything, we don't leave any room for God to move. Now, last week when Tom and I were in Utah, we stopped a few times to disc golf, another budget friendly hobby that we have, and we met a guy he had put a disc golf course on his land.

It was private land, but he opened it up to the public and we got there and he was playing around as well, and he struck up a conversation with us and he said, it's kind of windy today, and I'm not really sure what how we responded or what we said. We probably kind of like sided each other. And then he said, well, where are you from?

And I said, Nebraska. And then he said, oh, this wind is nothing for you, right? If you've ever played disc golf, if you've ever played any outdoor sport, if you've ever tried to walk across

the parking lot in Nebraska, you know about wind, right? You know, wind isn't just there. It changes things. It pushes you. It reduces checks, it forces you to adjust.

And sometimes that's how it feels to trust God with our life, with our giving. It's unpredictable. It's uncomfortable at times. It's like stepping into the wind and feeling like you might be blown over. Now, today, you'll have an opportunity to walk across our new parking lot, saying some prayers along the way for people who will worship in this building over the next several years, who will park in our lot over the next several years, and you'll make your way across to the field and where we hope to have a inclusive playground.

And you'll play for people who will play on our property over the next many years. And on your way out, you'll pick up a pinwheel. Now, a few weeks ago, it was a windy day and the staff decided to walk across the parking lot with our pin pinwheels because we had this great idea. Like, we'll get pinwheels, we'll stick it into the ground, and then we're like, ooh, the ground's pretty hard.

Is this going to work? So we walk across the parking lot to test this out, and on our way back, the wind kind of pushed us back to the building. And McKenzie Gordon, our marketing and communications coordinator, made this simple but profound statement. She said, it's a great day to be a pinwheel, and I love that, I love it.

It's stuck with me because a pinwheel doesn't fight the wind, it doesn't resist. It moves with it. It actually comes to life because of it. And that's what sacrificial giving is like. It's not about fighting or controlling, it's about trusting the movement of the Holy Spirit. It's about believing that when we move with God that God will sustain us, that we will come to life.

So as today, as we step into prayer and as we step into giving in faith, we ask ourselves, are we fighting the wind? Or are we catching the wind? Because when we trust God fully, it turns out it's a great day to be a pinwheel. Now, today's scripture comes from, it's, the story is found in both Mark and Luke's gospel accounts, accounts of Jesus's life.

And this is a story about trusting God. And today we're going to read from Mark chapter 12, and we're going to read this version of the story.

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. Now, if you grew up in the

church, if you spent any time in Scripture, you know this story, right? The widow and the two mites or the two copper coins? I've read this story.

I've heard this story interpreted over and over again, and every time I've heard it interpreted, it's about this act of faithfulness that's focused on the widow. The widow gave everything that she had, even what she needed to live on, right? Food, shelter, clothing, those basic things. She trusted God and said, I trust you, God, that you will provide for me.

That's always how I've heard that passage interpreted. Then this week, I read a commentary that challenged my thinking of this whole story. Now that's what Scripture should do for us. That's what we should do with each other in life groups. In Bible studies. We should be challenging each other, and say, okay, what is what is this passage telling us?

What is God? What can we learn from God from this passage? So back to this commentary that I read, basically it said read the passage right before this with Jesus witnessing the widow at the temple. And so here's the few verses before Jesus is at the temple teaching. And 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 these long prayers. They will be judged. Most harshly. And then the story goes right into the story of Jesus witnessing those putting their money into the treasury.

So the widow, in this story is not just a widow. She gave everything that she had. And a widow at the time of Jesus's ministry was marginalized and vulnerable. Women didn't have any power, right? If they didn't have a man to take care of them. The Jewish law states over and over again how, how we were we are supposed to care for the widows that the males are supposed to care for the widows, heirs.

Right. If a husband died, the brother would step in to care for the widow because if they didn't have a man to take care of them, they would be nothing. They would be poorer. They would be lost. Now. Jesus again, on his ministry toward his journey toward the cross. He also emphasized over and over again the importance of caring for the poor and the widows and the marginalized.

So maybe this passage about the widow isn't about the widow, because nobody likes to think about giving everything they have. Do you ever read this passage and be like, wow, I want to give everything I have because the widow gave everything they had, right? We don't say that. We say things like, is this what God? Is this what Jesus really wants us to do?

Does Jesus really want us to give everything that we have, even our money for groceries and rent, or where we think things like this? That's really good for the widow, that's really good for her, that she gave everything that she had. But that's not for me. Like, that doesn't work in real life. You can't just give everything that you have.

Well, maybe it's because we focused too much on the widow and not enough on the rich people. You know, the ones who are cheating the widows out of their homes because they just gave their spare change. Maybe this passage is more about condemning those who hold back their money. Now, greed is a problem. Since the beginning of time.

We read about it in Scripture. We see it today in our world. We see there are some politicians, there are some pastors. There are others in leadership positions who climb their way to the top because of money and power and fame. And what it's doing is it's making the gap between the rich and the poor grow wider. And because of it, the poor suffer.

And Jesus is pointing this out. So maybe it isn't a passage about giving everything that you have, but rather about considering what we hold back that might hurt others. Now, maybe the story is focused, is supposed to be focused on the widow, and maybe we're supposed to focus on the rich, but really, maybe it's both, because the point of this story, the point of Jesus pointing this out, is this.

That the value of a gift is not determined by the amount, but it's about the givers heart and the sacrifice made. Who will? Who might we save by giving? Who? Who might we hurt by not giving? Now this word sacrifice are the root word of sacrifice is sacred. And the Hebrew word that's most translated to sacrifice is as a Hebrew word called corban, which means coming close or to draw near.

So when we declare something to be sacred, we are setting it aside for a holy purpose we are dedicating it to as a way to serve Jesus. When people make a gift that is truly sacrificial, they are setting it aside. They are dedicating it. These resources to further the Kingdom of God. Now, in Scripture, sacrifice is always in the context of worship, with the focus of honoring God, of loving God, of drawing near to God in a time of worship.

So what motivates our generosity? Is it recognition? Is it worship? Is it putting off something that we really want for the sake of God's mission? Well, this passage can teach us so many different things, but one thing is that Jesus, that that God sees what others overlook. God sees what others overlook. God judges those who are getting ahead at the expense of others.

God sees that, but God also sees those who give with open hands and surrendered a surrendered heart. Now, in the time of Jesus, the religious leaders were more concerned

with status and with wealth than with compassion, and they devoured the widows houses. They offered these long prayers to show just how faithful they were. But the system was broken.

Jesus was like, this is not how it's supposed to be. And the widow's sacrifice shined bright in all of that darkness. Now, maybe you might feel like your giving doesn't compare to others. You're like, I can't give what others can give. Maybe you worry that it's too small or you wonder if God actually notices your sacrifice. Well, yes, God sees it.

God sees the late nights and the tough choices and the quiet acts of obedience. God sees what you let go of in order to hold on to your faith. In order for you to worship God. Jesus wasn't nearly as focused on what was being put into the temple treasury. He was focused on what was still left at home.

And in the widow's case, she held nothing back. And that is what caught Jesus's attention. And that's why today we're not we're not just talking about giving, we're talking about surrendering. And so we've been talking about this whole entire lent season as we renew our covenant with God, is surrendering ourselves and our lives to God. And we've been saying this Wesley covenant prayer along the way.

And so I'm going to say it, and I'll invite you to pray silently along with me. God, I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will place me, with whom you will put me to doing. Put me to suffering. Let me be put to work for you, or set aside for you, praise for you or criticize for you.

Let me be full. Let me be empty. Let me have all things. Let me have nothing. I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service. And now a wonderful and holy God, creator, Redeemer, and sustainer, you are mine, and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it also be made in heaven.

Amen. Now, I'll be honest with you, I still have a lot to learn about giving and trusting God. And I've learned even over the last several months through this beyond campaign of what giving is in the purpose of it. I like comfort, too. I like control, I like knowing that I have enough saved for retirement. But here's what I'm discovering along the way.

When we trust God and we let go, we don't lose. We actually catch the wind of God's grace and it brings us joy. Not a surface level happiness, not something that's fleeting, but anchor something that anchors us in uncertain times. It gives us hope. It reminds us that death is not the end, that God's kingdom is still breaking in, that even when we give and we let go, we are never out of God's care.

And so today we declare it's a great day to be a pinwheel, because we're not going to resist the wind. We're catching it. We're going to trust the spirit to move us in the direction that the spirit wants us to go. We're stepping forward in faith. We're open-handed. We're full hearted, and we are ready to be used by God. Amen.