

November 10, 2024
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 12:38–44 (Hebrews 9:24–28)

CERTAINTY IN UNCERTAINTY

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is always a lot of *uncertainty* in this world, so budgets, income, and expenses are a large part of congregational life. Our Church Council strives to be good stewards of your tithes and offerings, being fiscally responsible so that we don't tarnish the good Name of Christ Jesus. So, too, it is in family life. Each of us has to make decisions about how we handle the finances God has given us. Budgeting is difficult because of all the *uncertainty* such as inflation, unexpected medical costs, car and home repairs. Will your 2025 income be greater than your 2025 expenses? You have no way to be *certain*. But what is *certain* are the promises of God. He is faithful and just. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from His knowledge and will. (cf: Matthew 10:29) What is *certain* is that you have an eternal treasure in heaven, bought and paid for with Jesus' precious blood, that can never be taken away.

In the midst of this *uncertain* world, I want you to consider "*how you give*" your tithes and offerings to the church. Notice that I said "*how you give*" – not – "*how much you give*." So ask yourself: "*from what sort of attitude and motivation do you give your tithes and offerings to the church?*" Of course, "*how you give*" will almost always affect "*how much you give*." God does not care one bit about "*how much you give*" to the church. He doesn't care about wealth. He's the creator of all things. If He needed more wealth, He'd just create some more. He doesn't want or need your money – He wants your faith and trust in Him in your heart. In Him, you have *certainty*.

In our Gospel text this morning, Jesus presents us with two very different categories of people. Two different types of *certainty*. He contrasts the difference between the rich and the poor... the scribes and a poor widow. The contrast couldn't be any greater, both inside and out. Jesus warns the people to beware of the scribes – and – anyone who acts the way they do. Outwardly, the scribes set themselves apart from the rest of the people. They liked to draw attention to themselves by parading through the crowded marketplace wearing long flowing robes. They delighted in having the best seats in the synagogue and at the feasts. They would use their positions of influence to take advantage of the helpless, the hapless, and most particularly, the widows. They'd use legal loopholes to steal from the weak. They'd stand on the street corner praying prayers that were long on rhetoric and short in sincerity in an outward show of false piety.

As Jesus sits opposite of the temple treasury He watches people putting their money in the offering box. They didn't use paper money. They had copper and silver coins. Offerings in those

days were dropped into one of thirteen baskets situated around the courtyard of the temple, while everyone else could watch.

In a way, our text teaches proportional giving. Jesus said the rich had given out of their abundance. They *made* a lot, and they *gave* a lot. Proportional or percentage giving is the way the Lord God instructed Old Testament Israel to give. They were to give ten percent of their crops or whatever type of income they had.

In English, this ten percent proportion giving was called a tithe: *a tenth part*. It's a fair system because it works at any income level. Sure, some folks say, "*If I had a big income, I'd give ten percent, but my income is small.*" The nice thing about percentage giving is that it grows or shrinks with the paycheck. It works for everybody. A question that is often asked is: "*Are we required to tithe under the New Testament system?*" Giving ten percent was an Old Testament command... but Jesus came to fulfill the Law. So, is there a New Testament requirement to tithe today?

In the Old Testament, all the divine institutions and promises that the Lord God gave to His people – all pointed forward toward Jesus. They pointed to the promise of a Savior. You, being a New Testament creature, don't have to look forward to the promise because the promise has been fulfilled in the incarnate Christ Jesus. So, it is with tithing. The New Testament does not prescribe exactly what proportion or percentage of your first fruits income you should return to the Lord. The Old Testament first fruits commands pointed the people to the promise. They pointed to Jesus. Today, you have the promise fulfilled in Christ. You have the forgiveness of sins. You have life and salvation. So, for the redeemed child of God, tithing the Old Testament ten percent should be viewed as a minimum. It's a good place to start. It's a good response to the love that God in Christ Jesus has for you.

As I said earlier, God doesn't care "*how much you give*" to the church. He doesn't want your money – He wants your faith and trust in Him in your heart. You and I can only see what's on the outside. Jesus sees in the heart. And in our text, He tells us what's inside of their hearts. He tells us the motivation behind their giving.

The rich people make a pious public outward display of putting large sums of money into the offering box. They likely strut with pride as they dump large sums of money from their abundance as the common folk watch with coveting eyes. They rich will never notice that money is gone. Nothing will change in their lives because of their gift. Their *certainty* is in their riches.

But also outwardly, a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. (cf: Mark 12:41–42) In that culture the widow would have been ignored. Any woman whose husband died was usually classed with the homeless and orphans. If her husband died prematurely, it was considered a judgment for the sinful life *he* had led, and *she* became an object of disgrace. (cf: "Widow," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2140–2141) No husband meant she had no income. She would have been dressed in the clothes of the poor. Her gift seemed too small even to count. She lacked everything – except faith. Her *certainty* was in the Lord God.

On the outside, the rich people appear to have everything. They gave from their abundance. But they have nothing on the inside. They're spiritually overdrawn. They're spiritually bankrupt. The poor widow, however, on the outside looks as if she has nothing. But on the inside, she's abounding in faith and trust in God. She's overflowing with gifts that God has given. In our text Jesus:

"... 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.'" (Mark 12:43–44)

The widow neither gave from abundance nor stopped at ten percent. She gave it all. She gave all that she had – proportionally putting everyone else to shame. But the main point of our text is not proportional or percentage giving to the church. The story is not to tell you that you should give till it hurts just like the widow. It's not to tell you to follow her example and give everything, believing that God will send quail and manna every day for you to eat.

No. Our Lord God wants you to give your offerings in faith and trust. It's a faith and trust that recognizes what God has done for you in the *past* and believing what He'll continue to do for you in the *future*. In our text, the widow lacked everything – except faith. She'd lost her husband and source of income – but she believed that God always taken care of her in the past – and He'd continue to do so in the future.

Christian giving is always a matter of faith. When you recognize what God has done for you in the past, it's easier to trust He'll provide for your future. God has given you all you have – most especially a Savior, Christ Jesus. St Paul writes:

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

In His poverty, He gave all that He had, His humiliation, His suffering, His bleeding, breathing His last breath, and dying on the cross to secure your future... your eternity in heaven. If you and I believe as the widow did, should we not also give with the faith that she gave?

Scripture doesn't say what ultimately happened to the widow... and that's a good thing. If we knew it was a happy ending we might mistakenly think the point of the story was that if we give all that we have – then God will take care of us and we will never struggle. Or if we tithe, our income will go up next year. If we give extra, God will assure we don't lose our jobs. But that's not the point.

God cares for you because He loves you, not because of how much you give. All that you have is a precious gift He has given you to manage to care for yourself, to care for you neighbor, and to see that the Gospel is proclaimed to all nations. Your tithes and offerings will always be given into an *uncertain* future and are given in response to God's love for you. It's not ***"how much you give"*** but ***"how you give"***. That's why it's called giving in faith. You don't know what the next year will bring: a personal tragedy, losing your job, losing your home. Anything is possible

in this broken and sinful world. God doesn't promise you that kind of security. He promises a far *greater* security. He promises you a *certainty*. St. Peter writes that:

“According to [God’s] great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:3–5)

And to that, the writer to the Hebrews reminds us:

“Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time . . . to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” (Hebrews 9:28)

To that, we respond with the words from our Introit this morning:

“Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Ps 107:1)

It is *certain*. You have His promise. Christ Jesus is coming back for all believers – and that’s a *certainty* you can cling to. By His innocent suffering and death as your substitute on the cross, and in His resurrection, Jesus gives you *certainty* in the face of *uncertainty*. He has purchased you for an eternity in the kingdom of heaven and this is *certain* for everyone who believes.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.