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The Widow's Mite  
West Valley Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann

This morning I want you to pretend that you are 6 years old, and you love football.

Specifically, you love the New York Giants and their big, bruising running back Brandon Jacobs.

"One day, you hear that Brandon Jacobs isn't playing for the Giants anymore; he's playing for some other team on the West Coast that wears different colors – maroon and gold - in some other place way far away. You ask your mother to explain, and she tells you that the NY Giants just don't have enough money to keep Brandon Jacobs. "So you think to yourself, "Oh? Is that it? Money? All that we need to fix this is money? I have money! I'll send it to Brandon Jacobs and everything will be fine! Here! Here's money! All better!"

There was such a six year old...and that is why the following letter arrived in Brandon Jacobs' mailbox last year:

Dear Mr. Jacobs: (said the letter) 'My 6-year old son, Joseph, is a huge NY Giants fan. Last year he had the opportunity to go to a game, and he just fell in love with the team. He was very sad to learn that both you and Mario Manningham are no longer with the team.

When he asked me why you were going to SF I explained that the Giants did not have enough money to keep you. So, in an effort to convince you to return to NY, he wrote you the enclosed letter, and included all the money for you that he had from his piggy bank...\$3.36.

**'Dear Brandon Jacobs, So you could go back to the Giants, here is my money. Love, Joe'"**

Brandon Jacobs response? He told the press that he just wanted to cry... after he got the letter from this little boy he was fighting back tears all day. He told the press also that he might just stop by and pay Joseph an unexpected visit – just might show up on his doorstep one day.

Now, let me ask you...since Brandon Jacobs is a pretty wealthy guy who actually left to go to the 49ers to get more money...why would \$3.36 cents bring him to tears? Its certainly not the amount, is it?

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That \$3.36 brought Brandon Jacobs to tears – because it meant that one little boy valued Brandon Jacobs so much that he gave all that he had to get him to come back so that he could watch him play.

What if we valued the work of the kingdom of God that much...as much as Joe valued Brandon Jacobs...so that we would give our all to see God at work in peoples lives, in this church, in the community?

What if we had that mindset...God...I want you to show up for this ...for this person or this program that honors you....I am going to go all in for this one. I am going to pray without ceasing for this...I am going to give my time, my money, my talent to your kingdom and your work.

I am not going to hold back because I know that what makes a difference for your kingdom is the most important thing in this world – more important than anything else because its for eternity...and I don't want to be lukewarm about that...cause you weren't lukewarm for me when you went to the cross.

Just like you were all in for me Lord, I want to be all in for you.

Cause that's the way this poor widow was...she gave all that she had..She literally put her life on the line

What if we valued the things of God so much, that we put our lives on the line for the him? That we gave all that we had also...to see his purposes accomplished...The world would be a different place folks if all Christians did that.

## **1. THE WIDOWS MITE TEACHES US TO BE ALL IN FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

I think that when all is said and done in this life, I think that the question God will ask us about our giving at the end of it all, is not going to be give me the dollar and cents amount that you threw my way...but rather...

Where was your heart? Where were your priorities? What was most important for you in your life? What did you think about most? How did you spend your time? Did you value me the most? Did you value the work of my kingdom first and foremost? Did you throw your heart into giving your all?

You see it moves God when we give from a heart of gratitude that says *LORD I VALUE YOU so much, and I value your work. I want to see you show up in the lives of people I love, and in my own life, and I will give everything I have to that end.*

*Following you, Lord, isn't something I do out of guilt or a side activity or for social reasons, or when I need you to do something for me – no Lord, I*

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*value you first ...above all else...and I want to live valuing you first every day.*

When we live our lives in such a way, that's when God starts showing up.

When I went to Hawaiian Islands ministries there was a woman there named Vera who worked in rescuing young women who were victims of sex trafficking. And right there in Oahu this sex trafficking industry is thriving – and that's right where Vera worked.

And before Vera got involved in this she was kind of a lukewarm Christian. But through a series of amazing events that she shared with us, Vera knew the Lord wanted her to start doing something about this sex trafficking problem in Oahu. She felt the call. And yet she was reluctant because she knew it would take everything she had and it would change her life as she knew it– she would have to give her life over to this ministry completely once she started. But it was such a clear call...she finally gave in.

She started hanging out on street corners, talking to the girls who came there, and over time she developed two safe houses for these young women, and when those got full she even took some of them into her own home. By the time she spoke to us Vera had literally saved scores of young women's lives.

She said, "When you live in a way that is all in for the purposes of God, and you pray for something that you yourself are sacrificing for in your own life, it is amazing how the prayers are answered. I have prayed for these girls and time and again God has met their needs, given us the financial resources we need, and showed up in miraculous ways."

Now maybe you are thinking well that's very nice but I am old and worn out. Or maybe I have my own problems to deal with – I can't survive unless I work in a thankless job, or I have health problems, relationship problems, or I don't have time...or I haven't felt a call like that.

So the second thing the widows mite teaches us is this.

## **II. THE WIDOWS MITE TEACHES US THAT GOD MAJORS IN A BIG WAY IN SMALL THINGS**

Ever notice how God seems to like small things?

Like **sparrows** (we just heard the song about them) and little **children** no one else had time for, and **mustard seeds**...a **boys lunch** that get multiplied to feed thousands, and the **widows mite**? Jesus celebrated

all these seemingly tiny little insignificant things that most people didn't think were all that important.

Like I said, sometimes we might not feel like we are all that important either in the work of God. We may not feel that we have a whole to offer. We may feel tired, burnt out, insignificant in terms of making a difference for the Lord. We might feel poor in spirit or restricted in terms of our income or our time....you may not have much energy at the end of the day.

I know a lot of Christians feel guilty that we can't do more.

But what you got to know is this – ...when you give whatever you can, with gratitude and an all out love for the Lord -, God multiplies it and uses it for his glory.

He is a great multiplier of small things.

And just to emphasize what a small amount this widow had I am going to pass around to you the kind of coins she put into the offering that day. These coins are called **leptons** (IMAGE) and they were the smallest currency around from about 103-76BC.

When I got these in the mail...I ordered them to show you...I knew they would be small...but I didn't think they'd be this small! Wow...(pass around) teeny, tiny little things. The size of a pencil eraser!

Take a look at these two leptons...unbelievably small. And I want you to know that in contrast the temple was a place of great opulence, a business center – kind of like an ancient wall street..

In the court of women – where the treasury was located and where this widow was (it was called the court of women not because there were only women there, but because women couldn't get beyond it)- there were cloisters or porticos, and under the shelter of these were placed thirteen enormous chests with trumpet-shaped mouths into which huge offerings might be dropped. (IMAGE IF YOU CAN FIND ONE)

The money cast in was for the benefit of the Temple. An inscription on each chest showed to which one of the thirteen special items the money would be devoted; each box was like a dedicated account...one for the purchase of wood, one for the purchase of gold, or frankincense. And people would come and place loads of money into these huge beautiful ornate containers.

And then you have these two little coins... as you look at them, ...they seem sort out of place in such opulence, right? What good could come of them? They were cheap little pieces of Bronze worth about 1/8<sup>th</sup> the

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value of our penny and they were crudely made and extremely common. They didn't really have any value in and of themselves unless they were with other coins.

The widow had two of them that day. It was all that she had in the world.

She could have felt really out of place and self conscious with all the wealth around her. She could have decided to give nothing just so she wouldn't embarrass herself...or feel insignificant

But 2,000plus years later, whose offering do we remember?

The widow who gave the two leptons...

Jesus notices *her*, pointed *her* out, celebrated *her* gift over all the others in teaching his disciples... The smallest poorest gift of all, we are talking about that today in the Bay Area in 2013 – the wealthiest place in the nation.

In this environment our priorities can get pretty messed up. Someone once defined EGO – E-G-O as **Edging God Out**. There's a lot of Edging God Out in the Bay Area.

But there was a widow long ago who gave all that she had...and we are thinking about her today..., Why? Because the widow's heart was all in for God. And we need to remember what that means today...What seemed like a meager offering on the outside, was the largest offering of all from Jesus' perspective – because she gave all she had.

What about your heart today? Where is it? Cause this story is about the heart...Its

About what we value. About what matters most for us. About how we are meant to live our lives dedicated to the cause of Christ and Christ alone. About how we are meant to trust God with whatever we are able to give to him today, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem... cause God majors in small...when we give with a big heart of love for him.

What do you have to give today?

You may not think its much...but

Jesus always worked with something someone gave him...like the kid who gave his little lunch... Jesus needed to use what the boy gave him to multiply it to feed thousands. Like the widow who gave her two little leptons...in faith...and that we now talk about 2,000 plus years later

Today – you may be tired and worn out. But maybe you could call one of our shut ins today and remind them that Jesus loves them.

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You may be dealing with financial problems, and you can't give money, but maybe you could find an hour to volunteer with our CRASH ZONE kids...there's a plea for more volunteers in the program this morning. Who knows? One hour given in faith with a big heart could change a kids life.

You may not have a lot of Bible knowledge but maybe giving an hour of your time to attend the Tuesday night Bible study for women or men would be a widows mite way to grow in your faith and learn more about Jesus.

I had a friend who didn't have much time or money to spare. He had a busy life and couldn't volunteer much in his church, but was touched by the plight of the poor in Haiti

He decided to spend some time praying about what he could do to make a small difference. He said, Lord I don't have much time to spare, or money or energy. I am a hard working man and I am exhausted at night. How can I make a difference for you? The Lord led him to...

Start a ministry by simply asking people in his church to save their pennies – he called the ministry PENNIES FROM HEAVEN – and as each member of that congregation saved their “widows mites” thousands of dollars were raised to help alleviate poverty there. That ministry is still going on.

What do you have to give today? What has God put on your heart?

Don't hold back because you think you aren't worthy, or because you think it won't be good enough. That what you have to give won't matter. It all matters. Everything given with gratitude and faith in God will be multiplied for his purposes.

### **III. THE WIDOWS MITE TEACHES US TO TRUST GOD**

We don't for sure, but my hunch is that this widow had her needs provided for, after she gave everything away in faith. God wasn't going to let her down...this story alludes to a story in the old testament about a widow who provided for the prophet (Elijah) and then how Elijah provided a constant supply of oil and bread to meet all of her needs.

I have this game I played with the kids when they smaller – we're kind of still at it...and I've done it to illustrate to them the value of giving. And I know this will sound a little bit weird but when I give let's say \$100 to some cause, I will let them know, and I will say to them let's watch how we cannot possibly out give the Lord.

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Watch the money that we give out, come back in some way shape or form. When the \$100 comes back to us – and it always does in some strange way – and I'll point it out to them... the kids will say...OK Mom... give more. Or "I want to try it"...and we do it again...and we wait and we watch... ..And it has become this kind of cool experiment in giving. We're still at it, because God continues to return the favor. The truth is, whatever we give ends up coming back as a blessing to us. I had an elder once on Session say over and over, "When you don't give, you cheat yourself out of a blessing." I'll never forget that man. He was so right on...

And no matter how much we give whether time, talent or treasure its all a widows mite to God anyway. Why?

Because the truth is that we can't give to God anything that is not in a sense His own already.

So when we talk of someone doing anything for God or giving anything to God, it is really like what small children do.

I don't know if any of you have the experience of your little kids or grandkids and they come up to you and they say..."Mom...Dad..Grandma... Grandpa...can I have five dollars so that I can buy you a present?" Of course you give them the money...and then you are pleased with the childs present, but only an idiot would think that they are five dollars richer because of it, right?"

C.S. Lewis says the following:

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**"Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given to you by God. ...When someone has made this discovery, God can really get to work. It is after this that real life begins. The person is now awake..." - C.S. Lewis**

I think that day when Jesus sat and watched all the people putting their large sums of money into the treasury- and then he watched the poor widow putting in her two lepton –all that she had in the world, I think he might have thought..."*this widow is wide awake. She has given everything she has because she knows its not hers to keep anyway. It all belongs to the Lord who gives us all things – she's just surrendering it back to the rightful owner to be used for his glory.*"

So if we have the God who is the owner of all that we claim is ours...if we have him as our first value...if we are all out for the Lord, what's to keep us from living lives of extravagant generosity?

It all belongs to him, and he has entrusted us with certain resources to use for his glory. Give in Jesus name, just like the widow who was all out for

God, and know that **your mite – no matter how small - is mighty when placed in his hands.**

There is a story of a missionary who preached to a very poor congregation in Kenya about the value of giving. And the people came and brought their offerings that day – most of it was not in the form money but in the form of crops that they had harvested – melons and corn etc

Among the congregation was a woman named Pearl who had come to know Christ recently, but before this she had been a thief and made her livelihood that way. She had been so happy since she had found Jesus but her conversion was still rather new. She didn't bring anything up to the front that day, and it wasn't a surprise to the missionary because he knew that since she had become a Christian she really had no way of supporting herself and she was the poorest of the poor there that day.

But the following Sunday at the end of the service she left at the altar some currency which for us would have the value of about \$20 – a huge amount for that community. And when the missionary saw her do this, he was on the other side of the room cleaning up, and he thought...Oh no! She's gone back to stealing again. I am going to have to talk to her. So he took her aside with the money in hand and he said, "Pearl, where did you get this?" And he braced himself for her answer, afraid that he would have to tell her that the money needed to be returned to its rightful owner. Instead she looked up at him with a big grin and said,

"Its OK. I heard your sermon last week about how there is no greater thing than to give to our Savior. So I went to a landowner and told him I would work in his fields for the rest of my life if he would pay me this amount. He did and I am bringing this back to Jesus today. It's the only honest money I've ever had and I got it by giving my life away, because Jesus gave his life away for me. I've never felt so happy as I do right now. This money belongs to Jesus."

Talk about valuing God first and foremost. Talk about giving our all for the things of God...

Where's your heart today?

Bob is going to sing a song right now that talks about God raising us up and how little is much when we give our all to God. Use this time to ask the Lord, as Bob sings.....how do you want to raise me up so that I can live for the things that matter and value you first in my life...

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Dear Mr. Jacobs:

My 6-year old son, Joseph, is a huge NY Giants fan. Last year he had the opportunity to go to a game, and he just fell in love with the team. He was very sad to learn that both you and Mario Manningham are no longer with the team. When he asked me why you were going to SF I explained that the Giants did not have enough money to keep you. So, in an effort to convince you to return to NY he wrote you the enclosed letter, and included money for you from his piggy bank.

Joseph is just learning to read / write so I will help you by translating his letter:

"Dear Brandon Jacobs,

So you could go to the Giants, here is my money.

Love, Joe"

I hope this letter finds you well. Congratulations on the Superbowl win! Our family will miss you next year, but we wish you all the very best in San Francisco.

Sincerely,

  
Julie Armento

