

“Our Meager Mite PLUS God’s Extravagant Might”
B, Pentecost 25; Mark 12:38-44

November 11, 2018; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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Mark 12:38-44 The Message (MSG)

³⁸⁻⁴⁰ He continued teaching. “Watch out for the religion scholars. They love to walk around in academic gowns, preening in the radiance of public flattery, basking in prominent positions, sitting at the head table at every church function. And all the time they are exploiting the weak and helpless. The longer their prayers, the worse they get. But they’ll pay for it in the end.”

⁴¹⁻⁴⁴ Sitting across from the offering box, he was observing how the crowd tossed money in for the collection. Many of the rich were making large contributions. One poor widow came up and put in two small coins—a measly two cents. Jesus called his disciples over and said, “The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they’ll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn’t afford—she gave her all.”

I. NOT YOUR MOTHER’S STEWARDSHIP SERMON

All across the nation, in just about every church –well mainline Christian Protestant churches anyway, this is Stewardship Season. And today? Well, according to the calendar, and in synch with the lectionary passage of the “Widow’s Mite” this is.....you guessed it! Stewardship Sunday! And a Stewardship Sermon is on the docket.

Oh man! You’re thinking: “Why didn’t I stay home today, after all?! I could have claimed a Snow Day! And there’s a meeting

after church too, and it’s probably going to be a long and boring morning.....”

Well, I have news for you – this is NOT a stewardship sermon. And the meeting will *not* be long and boring. It’s quite exciting, in fact, the way our church is moving forward – through the sound barrier, you might say – into new horizons and possibilities!

And this? This message you might call an “UNstew Sermon.” Kinda like the UNcola! Remember that? I, for one have *always* preferred the UNcola –clear and tangy and sparkly – to the “Real Thing.”

Why an UNstew sermon? Because Stewardship is *not* a sermon. At least not a topic for once a year, especially at harvest season and in preparation for the coming budget year. And it’s certainly not *just* a season –though we’ve made it that in many churches since God walked the earth. It’s a “spiritual state.” A way of being. A way of life. Kind of like Bazaar!!!

Dr. Lisa Cressman calls Stewardship:
“A spiritual state of generosity and a perpetual quest for the well-being of all people...[and thus] a year-round adventure of appreciation and awe at God’s magnanimity.”

“Stewardship is our daily call rooted in the daily bread we’ve received.” (Lisa Cressman, 2017)

I would define it like this: Our meager mites PLUS God’s extravagant might, all mixed together, every day, in every way. THAT’s the Real Thing—to reach out in love to others and teach the world to sing....

A way of life. The Way of Jesus is a spiritual state of generosity.

II. A STORY OF GIFTS AND CHANGING LIVES
“Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate” (pgs. xii – xv, att.)

⁴¹ Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. ⁴² Then one poor widow came and threw in two ^[c]mites, which make a ^[c]quadrans. ⁴³ So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.”

I *am* going to talk about giving today. Just for a few minutes. And no, it’s not semantics – just replacing one word (stewardship) for another (money).

Today is a day to consider mites and might. Two ideas that go hand-in-hand in this faith journey that we are on together. Our mites and God’s might. AND. Together. Not a transaction, but an unrestrainable force that can change the world. Certainly change lives! And that’s what we’re all about –as a congregation walking in the Way of Jesus, following Christ’s lead; sharing the good news that God’s loves and cares for *every* single human being on this earth, and calls us to care the same.

III. WHAT TO DO WITH IT!

I love the part in the story about the young lawyer where he wouldn’t even *consider* giving a large gift to the church because they “wouldn’t know what to do with it!”

I wonder....

Did the widow think her Temple wouldn’t know what to do with it? How about the rich men?

Do *we* know what to DO with it?

With God’s mighty abundance, when it showers down upon us (or snows!)? Do we live every day, every Sunday, every season in a spiritual state of stewardship? Of basking in the gifts and goodness of God and bringing our mites to God in prayers of gratitude and gifts of ourselves to others?

Would *we* as church know “what to do with it” if we suddenly had a huge gift – something unusual?

Or, if we woke up one day and realized that we DO have huge and abundant gifts being given to us all the time? God is good! ALL the time! Is it possible that God and God’s might and extravagant abundance are surrounding us all the time, and we’re just not fully aware? That we’re looking at the bottom line with lenses of scarcity rather than the Top Line of God’s Limitless possibility?

IV. WAKING UP TO THE WONDER

We’ve been doing some “wondering” around here. These past couple years. Looking with wider lenses at God’s might and less at the meagerness of our mites. And that’s why we’re having a congregational meeting today, and why this is so very important.

We have wondered about our human resources – not just monetary – and where our own congregational structures and systems have been *limiting* us; keeping the circle too small. Where is how we organize ourselves keeping us from loving God, neighbor and self in the fullest, life-changing way possible, due to burnout, limited resources, limited energy and leadership?

Where we haven’t used the Best Practices we could, taken a close and prayerful look at how we carry out the work of the church and serve God’s Kindom.

Guidelines and org charts that once were created as helpful tools to share the ministry more *fully* as a wider team have become constricting and limiting. They’ve actually begun to *limit* participation and service –exactly the *opposite* of their original intent.

Our leaders have also been seeking a clear, strong, unified *vision* for us as a congregation – a clear, consensual sense of Who We Are. We’ve longed for a shared vision *and* agreed-

upon mission and focus for our church. Churches too often try to be “all things to all people” and serve in so many ways and “good causes” that energy and resources become dissipated. Like a river with countless diverting streams, we can lose a strong, energetic flow and current – even while serving God and neighbor in love.

So, we went back in our congregation’s history and discovered mission and identity statements that were right in synch with who we find ourselves being today. This IS who we are and who we’ve *always* been!

We don’t need to create a *new* Mission & Vision Statement as we move into our exciting future. Moderator Marge discovered an Identity Statement that CUCC had drafted several years ago and has brought it to our boards and Council and now brings it to us today –not to accept something *new*, but to *affirm* who we’ve always been –maybe we just didn’t know it!

Or had forgotten for a time; though you’ll see when you read it that these commitments in bullet points have *been here all along* – in our DNA; in our spirit as a congregation. It’s exciting to find ourselves right where we belong with our core values!

This *CUCC PURPOSE & IDENTITY STATEMENT* will be handed out to you at the meeting today right after worship. We will read it together and affirm that it “fits for us here and now.”

We will also consider some changes in how “we live and move and have our being” in the Spirit’s might together. Not our core values and purpose, but in how we organize ourselves to fulfill that purpose. Please stay and be part of that vital conversation –even if not a “voting member.” You, every one of you, are a member of the Body of Christ in this place, and have a part in these affirmations and decisions.

V. WONDERING AND WANDERING....

This is our “*mite*.” Who we are as a “church on the move.” What we bring to God and pair up with God’s might. If the

mission of this body excites you and is something you support and want to see thrive, then we encourage you to “give your mites” – your two cents, as it were!

Do you see the church and its ministries changing lives? Serving to feed and clothe and house and care for God’s children in the way that Jesus taught?

Does the church feed you spiritually, and respond with love and care to you in your times of need, as well as give you opportunities to reach out to others and care for them in community?

Does your soul find nourishment, inspiration, uplift when you gather here with your church family to worship, pray, sing and serve together? And fellowship and food of course!

Does your mind find lifelong learning, stretching in understanding of the bible, the teachings of the faith, and experiencing of others’ journeys and insights?

If so, do you want to see that continue? It will if you give to the mission of the Church. It will do more if you give more!

If you are not finding the mission is exciting you and feeding your spirit and inspiring you to feed others, then we encourage you to get involved with your time and energy and help guide us into an exciting, imagined future, hand-in-hand with God. Or do *all* of the above.

God is FAR mightier than we ask or imagine. If we are in step with *God’s* mission, the mighty abundance of God will shower down upon us like snow. We will have *many* mites – all shared and gathered up together into a mighty pile. *More* than we need to accomplish the ministry that is set before us. And so *then*, if it’s *more* than enough, we will build a bigger table, a wider circle, and do even *more* loving more of God’s children in this place and beyond.

We will bring our mites –not just coins, and not just bedbugs! But our mites of time and talent, energy and passion. Like the widow, giving her *all* to what she believed in—no matter how

small – we each bring what we have to share – not to be *compared* with others' gifts –it's not a competition!

You'll also be given an opportunity today, whether you're a voting member of the church or not, to explore what calls to you in the life of the church. Where you want to delve-in and share your presence, energy, heart.

Long-timers, short-timers, here-some-of-the-timers – we all have mites to share, and a place at the Table. We *all* get to be noticed. We all are and bring treasures that matter. Jesus notices who we are deep down and what we bring. Jesus encourages us to notice each other –maybe in ways we never have before.

“Oh, the church wouldn't know what to do with me! They wouldn't know what to do with my gift. My mite.” Oh ye of little faith. What a mighty God we serve! Let's see what God can do with us. Let's change the world. That's the REAL thing! Amen.