

[A Mighty Mite](#)

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By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

Mark 12: 38-44

38 As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, **39** and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. **40** They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.” **41** Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. **42** But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. **43** Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. **44** They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

You probably have heard about the guy in Tennessee who, upon hearing about the first death from the coronavirus on March 1, got in his van and began buying up all of the hand sanitizer he could get his hands on. In fact, he bought almost 18,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, from dollar stores, walmart, drug stores, wherever he could find it. And when folks started panicking about cleanliness, this entrepreneur went on Amazon and ebay

and began “making the product available, the product he bought for \$1/bottle, at the low low price of \$8-\$70/bottle. His public service of providing what the people wanted in their hour of need was making him a bunch of cash...until he got a little cocky and someone took notice of his “business” and contacted by the New York Times where he boasted that he was making “crazy money” off this scheme and defended his actions as a “public service” that was solving inefficiencies in the marketplace.”

It was about that time (one week ago) that the gentleman in question also got contacted by the Attorney Generals office. They wanted to talk to him about “price gouging.” Ebay and Amazon dropped him, and the new headline in MarketWatch read “Tennessee man donates his almost 18,000 bottles of hand sanitizer after furious backlash.”

Donates. It sounds rather magnanimous. What a guy!

I tell you this story because of today’s lesson from the Narrative Lectionary. We only read the last two sections of the reading for today. Mark begins with another telling of the Golden Rule. He describes Jesus’ conversation with a religious leader of the day, who, like Jesus, understands that loving God and one another is the crux of discipleship. It IS what being a person of God is all about.

Mark goes on to contrast this leader with the Pharisees, who he puts in the same category as our friend from Tennessee. *“Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39 and have the most important*

seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 40 They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers."

Jesus understood that the Pharisees were essential to the faith of his community. They had a lot to offer the people. The Pharisees understood the Law of Moses and the teachings of the faith. They were educated in prayer and filled with wisdom. They had financial resources and faith resources that they could be making available to their community...but instead, Jesus saw them gouging the people and lording their position over them. Jesus saw that the Pharisees had become religious profiteers who, had the access to eBay, would have marked up the price of sacrificial doves to "solve inefficiencies in the marketplace."

Mark compares this economy with the Mighty Mite of the Widow who Jesus observes at the Temple.

"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

The least "essential" person in the community becomes an example of Jesus' greatest command...which is an amazing way to reframe wealth!

In this season of coronavirus-19 many of us are called to do the very least for our community. We are called to stay at home. To keep physical distance from one another...and wash our hands. That's it. And it doesn't sound very flashy like donning a mask or putting on gloves and swabbing someone's nose or throat. It doesn't sound as exciting as serving food to people in cars so that they don't starve. It's not as snazzy as being there for someone, stocking shelves so that people have toilet paper and other essentials...but keeping distance from each other turns out to be a sacrifice. It is a giving away, it is making an offering, of all some of us have to live on.

- Since we met last Sunday, the Trustees and I had to encourage the folks who use our Parish House to vacate. To stop meeting in our building. That means The Garden House School. Boy Scouts. AA. Gone.
- We had to send the staff home (and in truth, this is the last time you'll see Fimi or anyone else here in the sanctuary with me until after the "distancing" is lifted. That goes into effect this evening).
- We had to figure out a way to emergency host the emergency homeless shelter in Beebe Hall this coming week, without physically being present to greet or serve our sisters and brothers who will call our space home for the next 7 nights.
- We, like most other businesses, have to shutter...which makes me shudder, because even though you drive me crazy some days, I love you. And I like to shake your hand or touch your shoulder when we are talking. I like to be in physical proximity with you because it

connects us to one another in ways that this lovely Zoom technology cannot do.

And like many of you, I hate this distancing thing. I am awake at 2, 3, and 4 in the morning most days, trying to figure out ways around it.

During this morning's "figuring" session God opened me up to a new way of thinking about this distancing, and in the process connected me deeply to today's lesson.

You see, like the Pharisees and Mr. TN, I had been thinking mostly about MY needs. I was looking out for who I thought was number 1!

What God showed me this morning is that instead of seeing distancing as a burden (which it is!) God helped me understand keeping distance *as an act of love, as an offering, the least I can do, to keep you safe and healthy...*and by "you" I mean, everyone I love. Everyone who is watching. Everyone who is listening. Everyone I enjoy being connected with. God helped me discern that keeping a distance from one another, allows us to humbly embrace the inessential nature of who we are, and proclaim in a very quiet way, that each of us is essential to the other. We want one another to keep healthy. We want one another to be safe. We want to live to a time when distancing is not needed and we can drive each other crazy in person! That's love! That's the attitude the widow brought to her offering as she gave everything she had, which is verrrry different from what the Pharisees or the guy from Tennessee are bringing to the party.

God showed me the currency of compassion!

By humbly committing to one another from a distance, we are saying, “I love you enough to sacrifice this time and space, so that we can share time and space in the future.”

Staying home is a faith statement that this weird time of coronavirus will end, eventually.

It is a faith statement that we trust God will help us find a way to manage this virulent virus.

It is a faith statement that whether we are together or apart our love of God and love of one another is the most important thing that binds us...and there is nothing that can really separate us from the love of God.

It turns out that the widows offering is a mighty mite in comparison to all of the finest robes and purell of the Pharisees or the guy from Tennessee. Her example of giving out of gratitude, out of faith, out of love for God and her community sets the standard for those of us who follow in her spiritual footsteps. We will get through this time. May we be blessed by God as we make our offering with love and sojourn together from a distance. In Jesus' name. Amen.