

## **The Grace of Two Small Copper Coins**

*November 8, 2009*

(Pentecost 23 – Year B)

Mark 12: 38-44

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

When I was in high school, I was very active in the youth group at our Episcopal church.

At my school, a new ecumenical group of students was forming called the Christian Student Union.

A girl invited me to one of the first meetings of the Christian Student Union, and I agreed to come.

The meeting of the Christian Student Union was held in the home of one of my classmates.

And after we had refreshments and chips, we moved into the living room for the meeting.

I guess about 20 high school students were at this meeting and everyone sat on couches or in chairs, forming a rough circle.

The leader of the Christian Student Union at Memorial High School welcomed us and made a few introductions.

The leader then asked for each of us to go around the room and to introduce ourselves.

The leader asked that each of us say our name.

In addition to our name, the leader asked us to tell everyone when and how we gave our life to Christ.

When the leader mentioned that we had to share when we gave our life to Christ, I began to sweat and my hands grew clammy.

I was a life-long Episcopalian, I was an acolyte and I was even the President of our youth group, yet I had never really understood the term “give your life to Christ.”

The only thing I could think of was that I gave my life to Christ when I was baptized and confirmed.

So I resolved that when my turn in the circle came around, I would say that I gave my life to Christ when I was baptized and confirmed.

Meanwhile, these teenagers in the Christian Student Union shared these amazing stories of giving their life to Christ.

They shared tear-jerking stories of conversion experiences where they could pinpoint the exact date and hour that they had given their life to Christ.

Finally, someone shared that they had given their life to Christ when they were baptized as a baby.

I was relieved that this story matched my own.

Yet, the rest of the group chastised this person, saying:

“No, it doesn’t count when your parents made the decision for you.

Tell us when *you* gave your life to Christ.”

Since the infant baptism story had been rejected, now I became really nervous.

And I felt that my experience as a Christian was not valued by this Christian Student Union.

When it came to my turn to speak, I babbled about how I had felt God on a church youth group ski trip when I was a sophomore.

And that story seemed to get me off the hook.

Yet I still remember that I felt that I had done something wrong.

I felt that I wasn’t doing things right, because I could not pinpoint, to their satisfaction, the exact date and hour that I had given my life to Christ.

And I never went back to another meeting of the Christian Student Union.

In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus sits opposite the Temple treasury.

Jesus points out a poor woman to his followers.

This poor widow puts into the temple collection box two small copper coins, only worth a penny.

Jesus points out that although the rich give out of their abundance, this woman, out of her poverty, gave everything she had.

Actually, if you look at this scripture passage in its original Greek language,

The passage does not say that the widow gives all of her *money*.

The passage actually says that she gives all of her *life*.

In thinking and praying about this sermon, I shared with my family at breakfast yesterday about where I was headed with the sermon.

I told them that the poor widow who gave the two small coins was not just giving her money.

I told them that the poor widow gave her whole life, just as we are to give our life to Christ.

Susan, John and I then discussed whether anyone has truly given *all* of their life to Christ, without holding anything back.

So then John, a true child of this century, said:

“Well, why don’t we just Google ‘Give Your Life to Christ’ and let’s see what the internet says.”

So I did that – and did you know that there is an actual website called [www.giveyourlifetochrist.com](http://www.giveyourlifetochrist.com)?

I went to the Give Your Life to Christ website, and found that they outline 6 simple steps to give your life to Christ.

The first five steps include repenting of your sins, believing in Jesus and saying a special prayer.

And according to the website, the last step, the sixth step to giving your life to Christ, is to click on the link below to purchase a special Bible for the low price of \$19.95, plus shipping and handling.

No wonder Christianity gets such a bad rap sometimes.

Now I don’t know anyone like the poor widow in Mark’s Gospel, who gave their last two coins, who gave their whole life to Christ, holding nothing back.

Even Mother Teresa had doubts as to God’s existence.

Yet, I believe that Jesus pointed out this poor widow - and how she gave her life – Because Jesus knew that in just a few days, *he* was going to give *his* life, on the Cross.

The poor widow who gives all her money, who gives her whole life, is a foreshadowing of Jesus, who gives his whole life for us.

Because before we give our life to Christ, Jesus gives his life for us.

It is not up to us to follow 6 easy steps or to recite some special prayer.

It is not up to us to generate some tear-jerking spiritual experience.

It is not all up to us.

It is all up to God, a God who loves us first, before we love him.<sup>1</sup>

It is up to God - who gives his life for us, before we ever give our life to Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 John 4:19

It is up to God - who gives us his last two coins, to show us how much we are loved.

It is not first all about what we do; it is first all about what God does for us. And because it is not all up to us – we call this undeserved and unearned love for us a gift.

We call it grace.

And our response to this grace, our response to God's undeserved, unearned love, is to give grace and undeserved love to others.

Because God has loved us first, then we give our life to Christ by loving cranky co-workers and malnourished children and aging parents.

Because God has loved us first, then we give our life to Christ by serving and hugging poor widows.<sup>2</sup>

So if someone ever asks you when you gave your life to Christ, Tell them that you can pinpoint the exact day and hour.

On a Friday afternoon, two thousand years ago, a criminal from Nazareth gave his life for you; he gave the only two coins he had.

And ever since that day two thousand years ago, there are no 6 simple steps that will ever earn you the gift and the love and the grace of that Cross.

Ever since that Friday afternoon, two thousand years ago, there is nothing that you have done, or will do, that will ever take away the gift - and the grace - of those two small copper coins.

AMEN.

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<sup>2</sup> See James 1:27