

## Mark 12:38-44

We heard about widows in two of our readings this morning. From 1 Kings 17 we learned that Elijah followed God's direction to go to a widow in Zarephath who would feed him in this time of famine. In Mark 12 we learned that a widow gave all the money she had to the offering at the temple. We hear that the widow Elijah met was blessed with a continual flow of oil and meal until the end of the famine. We aren't given any sense of an outcome of the widow Jesus mentions he said she was going to her death. Often times we think Jesus is applauding the woman's actions, when all he is doing is making an observation.

Why has Jesus singled out the widow who is giving her all? First and foremost is the fact that a widow in that culture would be so financially destitute that she has no more than a couple of coins to live on. The religious leaders were flaunting their wealth when they were supposed to be caring for the widow and orphan. They obviously were not doing that.

Second, Jesus is foreshadowing his own death. Jesus is aware that his death is in the near future; he realizes that he is giving everything he has, himself, in death. Those of you who just completed the study on the book of Hebrews know that the focus of the book is not that men make the coffee, He-brews, although that's not a bad idea. The book of Hebrews is focused on bringing people who were straying from being Christ followers back to knowing the fullness that is found in Christ alone. Our reading from Hebrews 9 reminds us that the priests offered a yearly sacrifice to take away the sins of the people. In and of itself the sacrifice needed to be repeated yearly. What Christ has done, making a sacrifice for sin, is once and for all; like the widow he was observing he gave everything he had....

Think about having a 10.00 bill, a dollar bill, a dime, and a penny. Which is worth more? Of course, the 10.00 bill. What the Old Testament lessons teach is that we are to give 10% of what we have as an offering. So, if we have \$10.00, we would give 1.00; if we have \$1.00, we would give a dime. The widow Jesus is addressing gave a penny. But what did she have? A penny. The widow didn't give 10% of what she had, she gave all she had. Jesus gave all he had. It sounds extreme when we put it that way, doesn't it? That's because it is extreme!

But think of it this way. Jesus asks us to give him our all. He's not asking us to bring all our income to the church and have nothing to live on. He's not asking us to sell everything we own and live as a pauper. He's asking us to intentionally budget some money to give to the church (which, by the way, is Jesus to the world), because you realize that God owns everything you have, it is just on loan to you, and you joyfully respond by giving a portion back so people can continue to learn about the Triune God. Jesus isn't asking for your material goods or your money. Jesus is asking to take center place in your heart. Jesus is asking for you to be totally dedicated to him and his ways. Jesus is asking for your all.

Back in the early '90s there was a fad in the Christian community of wearing rubber bracelets with the initials "WWJD" which stands for "what would Jesus do?" Wearing the bracelet reminded the wearer they were to consider what Jesus would do if he were in the same circumstance as the wearer. I don't know about you, but I sometimes wish I had one of those bracelets. I think actually looking at a physical reminder of what Jesus expects from me might keep me from making the wrong choice.

The WWJD roots go back to a book written in 1896 by Charles Sheldon... *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* The simple response is Jesus would love. But the novel is fascinating in that it begins with a homeless man challenging a preacher to take Christ's actions seriously. This leads to many of the novel's characters asking, "What would Jesus do?" when faced with decisions of some importance. This has the effect of making the characters embrace Christianity more seriously and to focus on what they see as its core – the life of Christ. (Sheldon, C. (1896). [In His Steps Archived](#) November 7, 2012, at the [Wayback Machine](#). First published by the *Chicago Advance* in serial form).

An updated version of this book was published in 1993 by the author's great-grandson Garrett Sheldon and co-author Deborah Morris in which the authors use many actual events in the lives of believers (Garrett W. Sheldon with Deborah Morris, *What Would Jesus Do? : a contemporary retelling of Charles M. Sheldon's classic In His Steps* (1993), p. iv). I haven't read the updated version, but it led a youth group leader in Michigan to help teenagers in her group understand the life of a Christian. By wearing the WWJD bracelet they were reminded to put Christ first. The phrase WWJD caught on and spread throughout the country. What else might wearing the bracelet have done other than being a personal reminder? Perhaps it would have piqued the interest of their friends who would ask what the initials meant, opening an opportunity to share Jesus with their friends. In my life before pastoral ministry I sold cosmetics for a short time. One of the marketing tools was a pin that read something like, "I have the best job. Ask me about it." There were several people who did ask. Think about it... we could get stickers saying "I attend a great church. Come with me" to wear as an icebreaker for Nov. 24, which Dave Mays will be telling us about after the sermon.

The WWJD bracelet also inspired a sequel... another bracelet with the acronym F.R.O.G., which stands for "Fully Rely On God". What would Jesus do? Fully rely on God ("FROG bracelets answer WWJD question". *Pentecostal Evangel* (4417–4442): 23–24. 1999). With this you may ask, "Where does that leave human will? If we fully rely on God, are we losing our own Christian responsibility?" No.

It's like going to a doctor and finding out you have high blood pressure. You've never had high blood pressure and all of a sudden you do. If the doctor takes the time to ask about how your lifestyle has changed and you realize you've started guzzling down 3 huge full power cups of coffee throughout the day on top of the 2 you used to only drink in the morning, the doctor may ask you to ease up on the caffeine and see the results. If your blood pressure goes back to normal you understand that you are still in control of your choices. You just chose to do what the doctor has asked of you. The same goes for relying on God. You are still in control, you just determine whether or not you will do what God asks of you.

How do you know what God asks? God wants you to put Christ first in your life. If what you perceive God is asking from you doesn't meet that criteria, it is not something God wants of you. Is what God is asking from you biblical? If not, it's not from God. Is this something God has asked of others at some point in time? Perhaps not, but that is a good litmus. Is what God is asking reasonable? That may be the most difficult of all. Because a widow giving her last penny and going off to die is not reasonable to most people. Jesus surrendering himself to die on the cross for our sin is not reasonable to some people.

God would never ask us to go against what we have learned from the scriptures, however where the Bible contradicts itself (and that does happen), follow the text that is most loving. That is grace.

As we go through November, with Thanksgiving coming at lightening speed, I invite you to look for God's grace throughout our world. Seek to do what Jesus would have you do. Put God first in your life and see what happens. And remember...  
All glory be to God!