

*"Two Coins"*  
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, November 11, 2018  
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*Two Coins*

When Betty and I were students at Union Theological Seminary,  
lunches were served in the school refectory.

One day as we walked down the food line  
there was a large basket of oranges.

Someone from the kitchen staff had posted a neat sign that read:

*"Fresh Florida Oranges! Take one and only one. Remember: Jesus is watching!"*

Well, further down the there was a large plate of warm chocolate chip cookies.

One of the seminarians had scribbled a note that said:

*"Take all the cookies you want. Remember: Jesus is busy watching the oranges."*

Let's put in the energy together to reflect on a story in the Holy Bible  
about what happened the day Jesus stopped to watch people  
as they put their gifts in the temple treasury.

<sup>41</sup> *He sat down opposite the treasury,  
and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury.*

*Many rich people put in large sums.*

<sup>42</sup> *A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins,  
which are worth a penny.*

<sup>43</sup> *Then he called his disciples and said to them,  
"Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more  
than all those who are contributing to the treasury.*

<sup>44</sup> *For all of them have contributed out of their abundance;  
but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had,  
all she had to live on."* --Mark 12: 41-44

Here is a biblical narrative about a follower of God  
who made the time to invest her whole self,  
to extend the effort to go all in.

What we learn and glean here might very well surprise us, inspire us,  
change us, leave us flat, heave us forward, and make a world of difference.  
Remember, Jesus is watching...

## **Two Coins**

The setting is Jerusalem.

The time is Passover, the same week that Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected.

These are the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Jesus and his followers have entered Jerusalem to great fanfare and celebration.

Some say it was a parade,

a celebration of joy, for Christ has come!

*God is alive and at work in the world!*

Some say it was a protest march,

a proclamation that in Jesus we shall overcome and be set free.

*God is alive and at work in the world!*

Some say it was a coronation march,

for God has sent a new king, a prince of peace.

*God is alive and at work in the world!*

Maybe it was all three...since God is alive and at work in the world.

In any case, ever since Jesus' faith community in Nazareth

tried to throw him off a cliff for preaching an inclusive and liberating Gospel,

Jesus Christ had been telling people to be quiet,

to please not make too much noise about him being the Messiah.

You see, He had ministry and mission and miracles to do.

But those days were over.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem He took off the kid gloves and put on boxing gloves;

He set aside the meek and mild approach and took a fighting stance for God.

We find him in Jerusalem setting himself

over and against the religious practices of the time.

He reflected more about transformation than the temple;

more about religious authenticity than false piety;

more about mission than maintenance.

During the days between his entrance into Jerusalem

and his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane,

Jesus made it clear that not all who say, "Lord, Lord"

are pleasing in the sight of God.

## **Two Coins**

She placed two coins into the temple treasury;

two coins which Jesus recognizes were her last two coins.

Why do you think she did that?

Did the widow know that Jesus, the Son of God, was watching?

Did she know that at that moment he was lavishing praise on her, on her faithfulness?

Did it matter?

What do you think mattered most to her?

The Gospel of Mark specifies that two *mites* (Greek *lepta*)

are together worth a [\*quadrans\*](#), the smallest Roman coin.

A *lepton* was the smallest and least valuable coin in circulation in [Palestine](#), worth about six minutes of an average daily wage.

Did you see the cartoon on the Widow's two mites?

It shows a woman in church as offering is being received, and reads:

*"Due to a misunderstanding, the Widow Harris put termites in the offering plate."*

I prefer to imagine that one coin represented sacrifice; the other commitment.

Sacrifice and commitment unite to form the foundation

of a life of faithfulness, grace, and love,

of building and sustaining community,

Think about the relationships which matter the most to you.

Personally, I can draw instantly upon the feelings

that flooded my soul in life-changing moments:

when I was married,

when I saw our son and daughter for the first time,

when I realized how much God loved me.

Sacrifice and commitment,

two words as small as tiny coins

yet filled with so much meaning and worth.

What would you do for love?

You would sacrifice anything to help if asked, if needed, if that is what it required.

Your commitment would take precedence over anything else.

This is what God feels and thinks about you.

This is what God invites, compels, calls, loves us into,

a relationship built on a solid foundation of sacrifice and commitment.

## **Two Coins**

Money matters.

Contrary to popular opinion and the film *Cabaret*,  
money does not make the world go around.

Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis said,  
*"I don't care for money much, but it does quiet my nerves."*

Money matters.

How, when, and why we practice faithful stewardship makes a world of difference.

While some gave out of their abundance  
a portion of their treasury, their talents, their time,  
Jesus admired how she dedicated all.

Remember, Jesus was watching...

He watched and admired how she gave all,  
and as he pointed out to his disciples,  
that made all the difference.

She sacrificed and committed her whole self.

Gratefully

Joyfully

Humbly

Generously

Unconditionally

The widow's two coins contributed to the cause of the temple  
as blessed gifts to the treasury.

They were a very welcome addition  
to the sum of feeding and sustaining the overall ministry.

Her gift of all she had, meaning that she was "all in" when it comes to God,  
contributed to the cause of changing hearts and minds and lives.

## **Two Coins**

Jesus watched, and learned, and was moved...deeply moved.

He was inspired.

He felt empowered.

He took away from that moment a greater sense of courage.

If she could sacrifice all for God,  
if she could be so committed to God,  
if she could give her all,  
then He could, too.

There is no coincidence here.

Her sacrifice and commitment touched the soul of Jesus of Nazareth,  
and that has made a world of difference.

Jesus got up from the seat in the temple and made preparations for dinner.  
He moved toward His Last Supper with His friends.  
He shared with all who would partake  
the Bread and the Cup,  
blessed emblems of His sacrifice and commitment,  
two words as small as tiny coins  
yet filled with so much meaning and worth.

## Two Coins

Why do we make the assumption that bigger is better?  
See what God can do with 12 tribes of Israel? 12 disciples? A handful of apostles?  
See what God can do with a family-sized church,  
blessed by a few families from all walks of life and love  
who put their whole selves into what we believe and love and affirm?  
Anthropologist Margaret Mead spoke a universal truth when she said:  
*"Never doubt that a small group  
of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world;  
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

A child with Downs Syndrome was about to be put on a horse for the first time.  
At Stride Ahead, located right down the road,  
horses and handlers are trained to provide safe, healing, fun experiences.  
The only problem was it took 10 minutes  
to pry the child from his mother's arms.  
Once he got on the horse and settled into the saddle, he loved it.  
Soon he was grinning with joy, sitting up tall, shouting "Yeehaw!"

Stride Ahead is a local non-profit that connects people in need,  
whether they have Downs Syndrome  
or suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder,  
The mission of Stride Ahead  
is to empower people in need in DeKalb County  
to achieve their highest potential.  
Stride Ahead uses horses in proven methods  
that provide transformative experiences  
in personal, social, educational, and physical development.  
Working with a 1,000-pound non-judgmental horse  
can restore confidence and trust, thus leading to improved quality of life.

Stride Ahead is a beneficiary of our outreach giving,  
our generosity in the wider community,  
our collective acts of Sacrifice and Commitment.

An American soldier was in training to be an Army Ranger.  
A training accident left him badly injured.  
He was brought here to Atlanta to be treated at the Shepherd Center.  
To help his healing from PTSD, he visited Stride Ahead.  
Stride was so important to his restoration  
that he brought his family to Decatur  
to visit and see for themselves.  
He's changed the course of his life:  
he's now committed to helping heal children in need,  
just as someone made a difference in his.

And thanks to our two coins, our tithes, our partnership in the community,  
we're a part of the healing, the help, the hope.  
Remember, Jesus is watching...

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

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***Extra Material***

A Christian was driving his family home on the Long Island Expressway.  
The line of cars at the tollbooth seemed to go on forever.  
When he finally pulled the car alongside the tollbooth,  
he threw his two coins in disgust toward the basket.  
For whatever reason – bad aim, too much force, whatever – they clanged off the rim.  
He could hear them roll around under the car.  
Totally frustrated, he ignored the red light and sped off down the highway.  
Within seconds he saw the flash of blue lights in his rear view mirror.  
He pulled over.  
As soon as the state trooper approached the vehicle he launched into a loud tirade  
against the tollbooth, the lousy traffic, the unnecessary tolls.  
The State Trooper did not say a word.  
He turned around and walked all the way back to the tollbooth.  
He pulled two coins out of his pocket.  
He placed them in the basket.

He walked all the way back to the car.

He looked the driver in the eyes and said,

*“Remember that that is the second time someone sacrificed Himself for you.”*