

Noticing the Little Things
Mark 12:41-44
NUCC Traditional
11 November 2018

*PRAY

The summer between my 10th and 11th grade years, my father was transferred to a new appointment. He became the District Superintendent for the United Methodist Church over a large geographic area in East Texas. For the first time in my young life, we got to choose where we went to church since my father was overseeing numerous churches, rather than serving one particular church.

My siblings and I were told that we would get to choose where we attended church, and we actually chose a smaller, family-sized church, instead of one of the large churches in my dad's district. We loved attending this church and getting involved. Shortly after I graduated college, my father was assigned to a local church in Houston and my family moved again. And shortly after that, something transformational happened in the life of the church we had attended in East Texas. A wealthy widow died and left the church a substantial amount of money. There were no restrictions on the gift and the church could do as they pleased with the money. They ultimately bought land in a growing part of town and re-located the church to a new area and are thriving to this day.

Legend has it that when this widow's estate attorney, who was also a member of the church, called to tell the pastor the news about the gift, the pastor expressed regret that he hadn't even known that the woman was ill. To which the attorney responded: "Well, pastor, this woman's plans were well-known, so I didn't put her on the prayer list. I was afraid how people would pray."

Unlike the widow in our church, the widow in this morning's scripture reading was not wealthy. In fact, this is the origin of the phrase "putting your two cents worth in."

The woman in this morning's reading is one of the nameless saints in the Gospel of Mark. She stands in the same company with two other anonymous women. The first had a hemorrhage and touched the cloak of Jesus to get well. The other anointed Jesus for death by breaking open a costly bottle of perfume. Like them, this woman comes out of the shadows for a moment and then disappears just as suddenly. We don't know much about her. Was she old or young? Did she have a house full of children or did she rock an empty cradle? We don't know where she lived, what she did with her days, or what kind of support she received, if any, from her extended family. Mark relates only three details about her. First, she was a widow. Second, she was poor. And third, she gave everything she had as a gift to support her place of worship.

According to diagrams and to the Biblical Commentaries, within the Temple proper was the area known as the Women's Court. There, along the walls, were thirteen large, metal, trumpet-shaped receptacles to receive offerings for various purposes.

It was across from this area that Jesus sat to teach. Now you have to remember that the atmosphere of the Temple was like a loud and boisterous market, all the time.

And into that cacophony of noise, motion, and excitement, people would come to make their offering. Some of the rich people put in large sums. And some of the rich people did it with great fanfare. You see, those receptacles sat in plain view and the clinking and clanking of their offering advertised to the crowds around the size of their offerings. The loud noise would cause people to turn and look.

Sometimes these rich people would go from one metal receptacle to another, loudly proclaiming just how generous they were, not with words but with the clinking and clanking of their coins in the receptacles. Jesus said that such donors have already received their reward.

But Jesus, sitting there teaching amidst all the noise of the Temple, heard when the widow quietly placed her two mites in the offering receptacle. He heard, and he pointed out her generosity. Why? **Because Jesus noticed the little things.** In life, in love, in grace, in forgiveness, Jesus was willing to name the tiniest things in life and call them blessed. When those around him were too busy, too noisy or moving too fast, Jesus pointed out mustard seeds, little children, and tiny coins, and called them good. Jesus noticed the little things in life, but I fear we have forgotten to do the same.

You see, I wonder if there are **two** miracles in this story. The first, obviously, being the generosity of the widow. But the second miracle being that Jesus heard the two coins drop into the Temple giving receptacle. Everyone around the Women's Court that day would have listened for the loud gifts that made a lot of noise as they were dropped into the trumpet-like containers. It would have signified great wealth, and people would have wanted to know who these individuals were. But when the widow dropped her two coins, they would have barely made a sound. It is unlikely that anyone noticed her appearance or her gift. She was a woman, she was a widow, and her gift was too insignificant to matter.

But it mattered to Jesus. It mattered to the one who welcomed women into his presence. While we do not know the woman's name, I believe that Jesus did. While the others in the Temple that day did not pay attention to her presence, Jesus did.

I had an interesting experience this week. I was invited back to my undergraduate alma mater for homecoming festivities. I had not been back in probably 10 years. I decided to attend and spoke as part of a panel on Wednesday night about “Living a Life of Meaning”; on Thursday evening I attended the Alumni Awards Dinner. Since my parents had attended the same college, they met me there and we enjoyed spending time on campus and reminiscing about our different times as students. Actually, all five of us attended Centenary College. Several years ago, there was an appeal to pave a new courtyard. Alumni were invited to purchase brick pavers for the courtyard, and could have the bricks etched with so many lines. Our family donated a paver with each of our names and graduation years on it. It was fun to track down that paver and see our names. And as we found it, on a crisp fall afternoon with the bell tower tolling the hour, we were so excited to see it. We took pictures and talked about the idyllic time that college represents in one’s life. We could feel the current students rolling their eyes as they walked by.

And so there, on a college campus, until some future building project down the road many years from now, are etched in stone the names of my family. And with that etching are our memories, hopes, and dreams of the future. Every day students walk past them, or over them, and don’t think a thing about it. And they shouldn’t, necessarily. But it does remind me of how the little things so often go unnoticed in life.

And so, I challenge each of us, especially as we enter a season of giving thanks, to notice the little things, whether it’s the little things our spouse does, or the little everyday miracles that God bestows on us, or the little things that a friend does without

us even asking. Let us not only recognize them, but let us give thanks for them, this day and always.