

Mark 12 Givers and Takers

Hope Community 10-4-2009

Texts:

Psalm 24:1-5

1 Timothy 6:6-11

Mark 12:41-44

SERMON

Some people are givers. And some people are takers. I've met and known both in my life. I'm sure you have too.

There are a few "takers" that come to mind, some from a while back, in a different place and time, when I didn't "work" in the church.

A corporate executive, who was overheard saying: "I am not here to make anyone else rich"

And another, who required the multi-million dollar salary, the huge office with the \$1000 chairs, the corporate jets to take him to meetings in other cities where he would visit the local office for 30 minutes, then going out for golf for the rest of the day. Some that lied. Some that were just greedy.

Some others, well they were takers to – just on a smaller scale. They weren't rich. They weren't famous. They were pretty normal as normal goes. They just "took" on a smaller scale. They demanded attention. They never gave it back. They wanted compliments. They never gave any. That kind of thing.

People that were takers, whenever they had the chance. Different scale perhaps, but pretty much the same thing.

You know, I didn't like working with them very much. I couldn't help but wonder – did it really make them happy?

And then, then there are the givers. I'm sure you know of folks like that too.

Their house is open to you. And their table. And their time. They stop to LISTEN to others. Really listen. If you need something, and they have it, you got it. They give. "Aunt Peggy" – no relation – gave food and love, for everyone she came into contact with. Some folks don't have much, but they share it anyway. That's just the way they are. They don't insist on being first, or filling their plate, or getting their way. Most of them can't hold a grudge if they tried, 'cause they give forgiveness just as quick as anything else. For them, it isn't all about what they have, or what they want. Life is a joy, and they want to share it.

Givers. I've known some folks like that too. I still do. Some of them – well, some of them even live around here. I admire them. I want to be like them.

Givers. I think it may be a good description of the widow in our Gospel text for today. *Mark 12:42-44 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.* ⁴³ *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.* ⁴⁴ *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."*

3 little verses about a sounds like a wonderful little old lady.

Can't you just imagine her, walking slowly up all the steps the Temple Mount - the highest point in Jerusalem. After all those stairs she crosses into the courtyard restricted to the Jews. She works her way across to the colonnade, and into the Court of Women – as far into the temple as the women were permitted to enter. Along the walls there were thirteen jars for gathering offerings – and she makes her way to one of these, pulls out a little leather bag, and drops two small copper coins. Maybe what she had received begging that day. Perhaps the little she had made baking bread for a few other families. That's all she had. And she put it all in.

It's a compelling image. It's often used as an example of faithful stewardship. She's a giver.

Christ's words certainly distinguish her from some of the other folks. But I wonder, if in Christ's words we might also hear something else as well:

Is she faithful? Or is she foolish? Can it be that she is both, perhaps?

She put in ALL she had to live on.

Well, she is certainly sacrificial. But should she be SO sacrificial, such that she gives what she needs to live on? And she isn't living on much, either. I tend to think that Christ admires her faithfulness. But do you think that maybe he also disapproves, at least a bit – maybe she shouldn't be giving as much as she did. Should she REALLY be giving *everything* she has to live on? Does God really need, or want, her last two coppers she would spend on bread?

Maybe we'll never know.

But she is certainly a giver. I think that she might be a wonderful person to know. I have a gut feel that she would probably welcome you or me into your little place, and give us her last piece of bread.

I admire her. Maybe you do to.

I'd like to be like her. Maybe. I think. If I'm honest with myself, maybe I'm not too sure. She reminds me of Mother Teresa.

This widow and Mother Teresa and others are wonderful, uplifting, sanctifying, examples to live by – until I think about really selling all I have (and all the family has too) and

maybe living in a really small place, with maybe two sets of clothes (one to wear, one to wash), and probably never eating out again unless someone else offers to pay. Am I ready for that? No, honestly, I'm not. I don't think at the point in my spiritual life I'd be living that way joyously, in good spirit and with contentment. I'd LIKE to be. I'd at least like to think that I'm moving in that direction.

Givers may give to God & neighbor, or one, or the other
But that heart of *giving* becomes their very nature
The first thought is "to give" rather than "to take" – whether it is giving attention, time, compliments, money or anything else.

That's my goal. Though I've got a long way to go to get there. I've got to work at it. I'm better at it with some things than I am with others.

In "church" we often talk about giving our "time, talent, and treasure".
They are all related. It all comes back to a heart for giving. A heart of generosity.
And that touches all of us, each and every day. It forces us to ask the question:
Who do we want to be like?

And that makes it is part of my walk, my worship, my growing in faithfulness, and my commitment to Hope and our ministries. It becomes part of my witness – how do I, and our family, answer God's call to faithful giving?

And as the pastor of Hope Community Church, I believe it is healthy and appropriate for me to be open about what we, as a family, give to God through this church. It isn't something to hide and avoid. It isn't something to brag about, either. But sharing a bit of our struggles, and our joys, is good and right.

Kim and I, our family, presenting give \$90 to Hope every week, and we make special contributions throughout the year. It all adds up to about 15% of our income. We give to other things to, like Body of Christ, and other things. Sometimes that seems like a lot. Sometimes it seems like a WHOLE lot. Then again, I suspect we have "more than average" – and should give more, too. God gave. God blessed. We are called to give back.

My Heart is compelled to give. I LIKE to give. I can't help thinking that quite often I don't need it, as much as I need to give it.

My heart's reaction to that is YES!

My head's reaction, on the other hand... is "wait!"

I may need it later.

What if I lose my job? Hey, Hope can't pay all its bills. Too many people are out of work and not enough offerings coming in. That's reality right now.

What about our kid's college?

What if...

There is some truth to all these. And they aren't really "selfish" responses, either. But they only hold SOME truth – just enough to make us pause. ***But that is also the voice of doubt and fear.***

But my head will ALWAYS be able to give me good reasons not to give of my time, my money, my attention, etc.

God gave us treasures – as well as time and talents - to care for, to keep, put to good use.

These are really for God's kingdom, not my kingdom

God calls me to be faithful: to serve God

Not my doubts, not my hobbies, and not my bank account.

But it can be a struggle.

My HEART wants to be a *giver*. I want to be more like the widow in the Gospel.

I LIKE giving. I find JOY in giving. Seeing something good happen. Something grow. Hope is GOOD. And Hope is GROWING. Growing in faith, ministry and impact on the community around us. I LIKE that we, as a family, can help make that happen.

I hope you feel the same way. It is a blessing to be part of Hope, and what is happening here.

So again, this fall, we all face this question:

What are we called to give?

Each of us are given different amounts of treasure. And different kinds.

Each of use are in different circumstances.

Your need your food, clothing and shelter. Your need to save.

Your answer to the question "what is enough" is different from every one else's.

If you head & heart say "no" or "no more" that may indeed be faithful.

The question about how much to give is between you & God. It isn't one to guilt you into.

But it is a question of heart, and faith. What is your goal? How do you live into your goal?

Listen to God. Listen to your heart. Pray.

And work out what is faithful for you. That is all that God really asks.