

“My Two Cents” based on Mark 12:38-44

Delivered by Rev. Carol Ann Hoard on November 10, 2024, at Shelby Presbyterian Church

Have you ever shared your opinion with someone and then said, "That's just my two cents" or "I'm giving my two cents? It's a way of signaling that you're offering your personal perspective, and the other person is welcome to disagree. By adding your "two cents," you're essentially saying, "This is just my view, but I could be wrong. I'm probably not, but I'm no expert—take it for what it's worth, which might not be much."

The widow today, the woman in our story gave her 2 cents and so this week, I have been pondering - What 2 cents I can I give you today that will help us most? How do we apply that lesson from thousands of years ago to our lives today? What could I give you that will be easy to remember, and worth at least two cents for coming today?

Today's gospel lesson is six short verses packed with a lot of meaning. I think Mark is trying to make a point here when he tells this story with the two paragraphs hooked together. One is about watching out for the scribes who are devouring the widows' houses. The other is about a widow giving her whole life. Could there be more than one valid way to interpret this passage? This passage is often used for the budget when it's low and we talk about she gave all she had so you need to give all you can to keep the power on. It can be that.

If you had to offer your two cents worth, what would you say?

I want you to imagine the scene. Jesus is at the temple, observing how the wealthy contribute their offerings, with their noticeable abundance falling into the treasury. Cling, ch-ching, cling, ch-ching, almost like someone winning the jackpot. But then, he notices this widow. She comes in poor, vulnerable, and overlooked by the very system that should provide her protection and support. She drops her 2 coins – cling, cling – her 2 cents.

Just before this moment, Jesus has condemned the scribes, calling them out for "devouring widows' houses." These are the people entrusted to care for this woman and those most in need. Jesus calls us into the kind of discipleship that gives up everything for the sake of the gospel. Drop your nets, leave your family, come and follow me. Jesus calls us into sacrificial living, not just sacrificial giving.

There was a pig and a chicken, and they were walking down the road. As they pass a church, they notice that a potluck charity breakfast was under way. Caught up in the spirit, the pig suggests to the chicken that they go eat and make a contribution. "Great Idea!" the chicken cried. "Let's offer them ham and eggs!" "Not so fast." said the pig. "For you, that's just a contribution, but for me, it's a total sacrifice."

Friends, we must ask ourselves: what does it mean for us to live sacrificially in a world that often prioritizes wealth and power over compassion and care? Jesus calls us not only to give but to invest ourselves in the well-being of others in our community in love, justice, and mercy. The question isn't merely about financial contributions; it's about how we offer our lives as a gift.

It's not about the accomplishments, but the faithfulness. Some gave an amount that could accomplish much but she gave faithfully. I struggled this week if I'm honest. I struggled about what to say and when you struggle, you ask for help. So I called Jim McConnell, professor at Gardner

Webb Divinity School. I said, “Jim, we need to talk.” And so, he talked me off some cliffs and helped me see what God was trying to say in this. He said no where in the bible does it say we are supposed to tithe in the New Testament. No where does Jesus say to give a tithe, but we automatically assume we are to give 10 percent.

He said he tells his students, “Let’s say there’s this man who makes \$200,000 and he gives his 10 percent, which is \$20,000. Then there’s the single mom widow who makes \$20,000 and she gives her 10 percent of \$2,000 and you know this makes a big difference in her life.”

This widow, with her two small coins, teaches us that it is not the amount that matters, but the heart behind the offering. Now, think of your life in this moment as the gift. What if you think of yourself as those two coins being given to God? Where can you invest yourself? Maybe it’s rocking a baby in the nursery. I don’t know. But we need to think, how can we contribute to God’s purpose and mission? We may not think those coins amount to much.

Yet, like the widow’s two cents, you may not consider what you have—your time, your talents, your kindness—to be even significant at all. Yet, Jesus shows us that every act of love, every moment of generosity, counts immensely in the grand tapestry of God’s purpose and mission. So, where can you invest yourself? In what ways can you contribute to the flourishing of your neighbor, your community, or the Church?

Henry Blackaby wrote a bible study decades ago called, “Experiencing God,” and some of you may have done it. In it, he talks about how God doesn’t need us. God is at work all around us. God is at work at Turning Point. God is at work in every little place. So, we need to join in with God’s work so that we can experience God.

Retired people? I’m tired, already done it, let’s let the young people do it. We don’t need to do that. Young families? I know you’re busy. Your children are listening to what you’re saying. When you pass someone on the corner of the street, they hear what you say. Teenagers? Well, I’m not going to go there. Just kidding. They hear that from me all the time. We are tempted to say let somebody else do it. I don’t have time. I’d rather just give you some money or something.

But we all have something to offer. All of us. Young people- Your children are watching, listening? Five minutes of listening to somebody, even when you’re late. That five minutes could change somebody’s life. Your smile could mean anything. Your kind words could mean somebody’s day went from bad to better. Taking the time to go with somebody to go to the doctor when they’re expecting bad news. These are little things that add up to a lot.

Perhaps the true beauty of this story isn’t found in the differences between the rich and the poor, or in the gifts we offer, but in the actions of Jesus and what he does. Jesus sees this widow—Among all the people putting money into the Temple treasury, he notices her. He sees her humanity, her courage, her worth. In a society that often overlooks those who are vulnerable, Jesus lifts her up as an example for all of us.

He draws our attention to her personhood and her sacrifice, reminding us that each individual and each contribution—no matter how small—has such great value in the eyes of God. He wants his disciples to learn from her, because he says: “Truly I tell you this.” Perhaps the first lesson he

wanted his disciples to learn is simply to notice her. To see her. To acknowledge her person, her being, and her offering. She is not an object lesson, but a person. Easily unseen, even invisible, yet she is worthy of Jesus' attention, and ours.

The widow is a real person. It's easy to put some label on her so we don't have to think about her very much. Like Zacchaeus, what's his label? He was the wee little man. That was his label. Years ago when I read this scripture, you know how I get my words tangled up and I miss pronounce words. My brain starts going faster than my mouth or my mouth goes faster than my brain. But I read this scripture and finished reading and sat down. Perry, another minister looked over at me and said "is she kin to the wee little man" because I said, "the wee little woman."

Jesus in his compassion and awareness saw this woman beyond the labels and the labels we give people. What he saw was not merely her two small coins, but the very essence of her being. Jesus sees her, and all the people like her who pass through our lives who are ignored or forgotten.

Today we honor veterans who have served our country, and who are too often forgotten or ignored. We also remember those who gave their lives in combat for our freedom. On November the 9th and 10th in 1938, an organized campaign of street violence broke out in Germany and Austria, aimed at Jewish businesses and families.

"Crystal Night" is known as the Night of Broken Glass. The streets were littered with broken glass from the windows of synagogues, homes, and Jewish-owned businesses which were plundered and destroyed during the violence. More than 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up and sent to concentration camps.[1]

David Lose, a Lutheran seminary professor writes, "Clearly the problem was not that the Nazis didn't notice the Jews living around them, but rather that they would not see them as genuine persons deserving love and respect, as kin in the larger human family, let alone as kindred children of God. Indeed, they saw them as opponents to be feared. When we do not notice people, we are apt to forget about or ignore them. That is a sin and a shame. When we do not see others as human – because we have been taught to fear or despise them – we are likely to treat them inhumanely, which is a sin, a shame, and a crime." [2]

Only Jesus can change our lives and give us hope for a future. Instead of hating and hurting, we can love and heal. Jesus calls us right now to see the widow, and to recognize her deepest need. It's the same need we all have. We need to be cared for in a way that only God can care for us, to be loved in a way that only God can love us, and to be seen as only Christ can see us.

It's generally a safe assumption that some of us are going through something difficult right now. Most people are dealing with something hard, whether we know it or not. Some are waiting for a test result, going through broken friendships, family issues, and trust issues.

When I was in 5th grade, my teacher noticed something was off. She told my mom, "You might want to take CA to the eye doctor." So, off I went, and sure enough, I needed glasses. I'll never forget the moment I put them on for the first time. The world had been a blur. Trees were green blobs in a distance. When I put those glasses on, trees had leaves and it was amazing. From that moment on, I wore glasses or contacts every day, and my vision stayed clear—until a few years ago.

Things started getting blurry again. I could still see, but not as sharply as before. So, I went back to the eye doctor and was told I was getting old. I switched doctors. So I went to a new doctor and he said I needed a new kind of lens—a progressive lens. These lenses were designed to help me see clearly at different distances, far off, at a computer screen, and up close. It sounded great, but, the doctor warned, “It may take some time to adjust.” I thought, “Sure, no problem.”

Well, eleven months later, I still couldn’t see properly. The middle part of my glasses just wasn’t quite right, and that little misalignment kept everything out of focus. That tiny imperfection made all the difference.

Much like my glasses, our vision of the world and the people around us can get blurry. Sometimes, we can’t see the hurt, the struggles, the pain that others are going through. It’s easy to walk by. It’s easy to drive by and not really see the needs of others. But what if our spiritual vision could be fine-tuned? What if we’re missing the heartache, the suffering, the opportunities to show compassion because we’re not fine-tuned?

To see clearly, we need God to tweak our spiritual lenses. We need Him to adjust our hearts so that we can see people the way He sees them—with love, compassion, and understanding. Jesus didn’t just see people from a distance. He saw their pain, their brokenness, and he reached out to heal and restore them. He calls us to do the same.

Who are the widows that we need to see? Who are those in our communities who are overlooked, marginalized, or forgotten? How can we respond to their needs in a way that reflects the love of Christ? This sacrificial living invites us to consider how we can bear witness to Jesus Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

So, let us ask ourselves: How do we recognize the needs of those around us? Are we merely observers of injustice in the world. Are we willing to step into the fray to invest our very own lives into God’s mission of love and care?

May we be willing to offer our two cents—not just as a matter of contribution, but as a reflection of our commitment to live sacrificially. If we genuinely desire to be like Jesus, we must cultivate the ability to see like Jesus.

Jesus did not overlook the widow. Instead, he recognized her as a beloved child of God. He saw her, not as a statistic, but as a person with feelings, dignity, and worth. When we look at others through the eyes of Christ, we begin to see the truth of our shared humanity and the pain that so many endure. We can’t live or give sacrificially until we see that it means giving ourselves, just as Jesus gave himself for us. We can’t see Jesus until we see the widow, and recognize her as one of us, instead of as someone or something that is apart from us.

If we want to be like Jesus, we have to see like Jesus. When we see others through the lens of God’s love, we not only understand their pain, we’re also equipped to make a difference in their lives. Just like my glasses, sometimes it takes a little adjustment, but when Jesus fine-tunes our vision, he helps us see clearly, with his eyes and his heart. And that my friends is my 2 cents. Amen.

[1] <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kristallnacht>

[2] <http://www.davidlose.net/2018/11/pentecost-25-b-seeing-the-widow/>