

The gospel reading this morning tells us about a poor widow who gave God everything she had. Her two small coins, we should understand, would be two pennies for you and me. She gave these coins to the Temple in Jerusalem, the last money she had in all the world. I suppose that this would be a good text for a stewardship sermon, and we are coming up on that time of year, but I hope you understand that this story is about a lot more than how much money we give the church. It is about how we give and what we give and it asks whether we are giving what we should. This reflects a much deeper question, "What is your relationship with God worth to you?"

There is an Old Testament story, in First Kings, that tells a different story with the same theme. It is about truly giving from the heart. During a famine in Israel, the prophet Elijah went to the village of Sarephath, and there he asked a widow to please feed him. He begged a little bread and water, only to find that the widow and her child were down to their very last meal. The widow planned to eat, lie down and die. Yet that which was insufficient for two, the widow divided by three. Elijah then called upon God to provide enough food for all of them, for as long as they needed it. God did as Elijah asked. There is another teaching point, here. When we give to God, whether it is time, talent or treasure, we find true fulfillment. Jesus said that we should not concern ourselves with worldly things, but rather lay up our treasures in heaven. It is saying the same thing. When we give of ourselves to do the work of God, our spiritual rewards are great.

I knew a woman, years ago, that attended my parish. This goes back to the very early days of my ministry. She was not a wealthy woman by any means, but she tithed what income she had. She also gave hours and hours of personal time to the parish, in many capacities: treasurer, vestry member, volunteer secretary when I was between secretaries, coming to the office, after her day job, to do what ever needed to be done. At parish suppers, she was always a kitchen helper. She served as a Sunday School teacher, and on Saturdays she worked in the parish thrift shop. She was someone of whom you could truly say, "She does it all." I marveled at this then and I marvel at it now. When I asked her how it was that she gave so generously, she told that there was a time when she gave nothing. Then, husband was killed in an aircraft accident and she gave up on life; she found herself spiritually and financially broken.

One day she went to church and heard the gospel reading that we have today. She was moved by it. She had no money, so she started giving her time. She said that the reward was so great that she gave more - and more and more. "It feels so good," she said, "that now I just can't stop giving." Her experience was the same as Elijah's widow. She found that the vessel of herself never emptied. There was always enough, sometimes just enough but always enough. And, then she began to really prosper. God was faithful to

her, as he was faithful to Elijah's widow. Love came again; she found a good job that she really loved. She was one of the happiest, most content persons I've ever known.

Where am I going with all of this? Sacrificial giving, called stewardship in the church, is something that we learn to value only by jumping in and doing it. Giving of ourselves this way takes some courage and trust that the lord will guide us. God asks that we give, not out of obligation, but love. As our Lord gave to us sacrificially, so we should give back sacrificially. And then we will understand what our Lord meant about giving from the heart. *Amen.*