

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor

October 9, 2022

Lesson 6

Title: Gifts of the Widows

Texts: 1 Kings 17:8-24; Luke 21:1-4

This week's study texts give accounts of two women who pleased God by the generosity of their giving. Neither of them had much in Wells Fargo, but they emptied the account to give. When I typed the title of this lesson (which was subsequently changed), I made a typographical error and put: "Widow of Zarephath and Window Offering." Boy, would that have changed the meaning of the story! I suggested (by poor typing) that the widow made her gift in front of a window so all could see. Not so! In fact, if Jesus had not pointed it out, her generosity would have been silent and unnoticed.

On Stewardship Sunday at the church I attend, we were each given an envelope and a blank piece of paper. We were invited to write our pledge/tithe/offering amount on that paper. "Put it in the envelope; seal the envelope; and then sign your name on the back of the envelope." Then the chair of our Finance Committee said, "Thank you. We are not going to open the envelopes. That is between you and God."

Money. Let's face it. Most of us undertaking this study are relatively comfortable in the dollars and cents department. Our next meal is probably already in the refrigerator. In the closet, there is a warm jacket we can wear when the fall weather takes a temperature dip. All of that makes it hard for us to hear our Lord speak negatively about those who have "contributed out of their abundance."

There is another component to life's journey: time. Is it fair to say that we all have exactly the same amount of time each day? How do I spend my time? If I were to tithe my time, I'd give about two hours and 24 minutes a day to causes of service and witness and ministry. (And I'd probably stop complaining about having to get up early on Sunday in order to get to Sunday school on time.)

I know of one church that has a file of what different members of the congregation suggest for their own funeral services. In one of those folders, a member has asked that at his memorial service there be an offering taken for some community need. I've never been to a funeral where they took up an offering. Of course, I've never seen a widow "put in all she had to live on." I wonder how Jesus feels about that funeral folder.

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "It's yours, O Lord, so take it and use it."

F. Belton Joyner is a retired elder in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. He has served in a variety of local church and connectional responsibilities. His publications range from church school curriculum to theology popularization to mystery novels. He has written these weekly thoughts on the lessons in Adult Bible Studies for his conference newsletter since December 2001. They are printed here with permission.