

## LEAD WITH LOVE

Rev. Mary Scifres  
Mark 12:28-34

November 11, 2018  
Community Church Congregational

This is a story about a keyboard, but not really. Kind of like today's scripture is the story of a widow's two coins, but not really. My friend Julie lives on a fixed income in her retirement years. Trying to find ways to still give when she has so little income, she's been downsizing lately, cleaning out cupboards and giving away things she realizes she can live without: office supplies to her friends who work from home, books to people in her book club, and even furniture to her kids. So when she heard about an east coast student who needed a keyboard for his music studies at Azusa Pacific, she looked at her beloved keyboard and decided she could give that away as well. Julie loves music; she has a beautiful voice and sang in her church's praise team for many years. But the praise team was disbanded this year, so she doesn't need to practice her alto part for Sundays any more. And she really doesn't play much, because the arthritis makes it too painful. And so, in September, she packed up that keyboard, gave it to the young woman at her church who'd told her about the student who needed a keyboard, and gave him all she had to give. It's not a new keyboard; it's not state of the art; but it can connect to his computer and allow him to compose with his computer software as he plays the music as he hears it in his mind. But Julie's gift of a keyboard is just one gift in a long series of gifts that led to a particularly inspirational concert earlier this month at Azusa.

The story really began in August, when this young man from the east coast showed up early, as all the choral students do, for a week of choir camp, where they focus their rehearsals to prepare for their fall concert, an All Saints' Day concert. He showed up to sing, but as the professor outlined his vision for this year's concert, the young man began hearing two choral

*Give with Love – Mark 12:38-44 – © 2018 Rev. Mary Scifres – [www.maryscifres.com](http://www.maryscifres.com)*

anthems pour through his soul ready to be written. He sensed that they were songs about death and resurrection, the theme of the concert, but he had no time in a busy rehearsal schedule to start putting notes to a page. So after that first rehearsal, he went to his director to explain his dilemma. As a scholarship student, he's there to sing. But these two anthems were yearning to be written. And so, his professor gave him the gift of time – excusing him from rehearsals that week so that this young composer could sing and play what he was envisioning and begin composing the two anthems. This young man spent every waking moment in rehearsal rooms and computer labs trying to compose, since he couldn't afford his own equipment. When classes began the next week, his compositions still weren't finished; and now he had even less free time. He talked about his time struggle with his Orange Country friend. And she thought of Julie and wondered if Julie was ready to share her keyboard with someone. She picked up the phone and without hesitation, Julie said, "Absolutely!" Now the student is composing in his dorm room, with a keyboard connected to his computer, so he can compose directly into a computer program that transcribes the music he plays into a musical score.

Each person gave from the gifts they'd been given, just as this widow does in today's story. Each person gave gladly and generously, just as this widow does in today's scripture. Each person gave not out of obligation or requirement, but out of opportunity.

This is Covenant Season here at Community Church, which means it's the season when we think about what we're going to give to God through our church in the year ahead. One very important aspect of that giving is our financial support. How much do we give? How much should we give? How much can we give?

This poor widow gave all that she had – two tiny coins. And because she gave so fully

and so generously, Jesus proclaims that her two tiny coins are more valuable to God than huge offerings others give from their spare change. The point is not how much she gave, but that she gave so intentionally, even when what she had to give was such a tiny amount.

Giving intentionally, as the widow did, is an opportunity to grow closer to God and others. That growth in faith and closeness with God and others can change us, even transform us. If we just drop our spare change in the offering plate when we happen to be in worship, we miss an opportunity. If we just occasionally give when we have some extra money in our pockets, we miss an opportunity. If we just give when we think we can afford it, we miss an opportunity. If we just give to show off to others or just get our tax deduction, we miss an opportunity.

Giving out of loving commitment to God is an opportunity. Giving intentionally out of loving commitment connects us more closely to God. Giving out of loving commitment to your church is an opportunity to connect more closely to your church. Giving out of loving commitment to the people of God's world, through whatever church or hospital or school or service group you support connects you more closely to those people who are served and cared for. Just like giving out of loving commitment to the family and friends in your life connects you more closely to those people. Julie will be forever connected to this young composer, and all of us who've stood around her keyboard to sing Christmas carols in years past are now also connected to that young man.

That's the beauty of giving with intentionality and loving commitment. It connects you. It can even change you. When that widow gave her last two coins, she obviously did so very intentionally. Those coins mattered to her; she was literally giving her very last penny to God's holy temple. So, the temple must have mattered to her. God must have mattered to her. There she

is, at the end of her rope, with almost nothing left to give, and she goes to church and gives her last coins. In that gift, she connects directly with God and God's church. It's almost as if her gift is a prayer. She needs help. She needs God. She needs God's people. And so she gives everything she can, somehow trusting that in that gift she'll get what she needs.

I don't know how she found the courage to give her last penny to God and God's temple, but in that trust and in that giving, Jesus was inspired. Jesus was inspired. Jesus lifts her example, not because her two little coins were big gifts in the temple treasury, but because they were big gifts from her little purse, made even bigger because of the faithful trust, the loving commitment, and the intentional giving that they represent. When I revisit this scripture, I often think of the Mother Theresa quote: "We cannot all do great things. But we can do small things with great love."

When we give with love and trust, the gift becomes huge. And that's important to remember in Covenant season, because I've already heard some of you worrying that your gifts aren't big enough to matter. We don't all have to sing as beautifully as Alan to sing to the Lord. Even the quietest or scratchiest voice singing a hymn matters to God. We don't all have to know the Bible backward and forward to give a Sunday message or attend a Bible study. Your study and your words matter to this church. We don't all have to tithe from 6-digit incomes for our tithe to matter. Your gifts make this church a stronger place. Each song matters. Each person's study and discussion of scripture matters. Each gift and tithe matters.

And when we give those gifts with great love and committed intentionality, those gifts that already matter begin to matter even more. Gifts strengthened with love become more powerful. Gifts given from commitment connect us more closely together, because now we've

committed to count on each other and our gifts.

On November 1, the university chorale performed those two anthems. So many givers brought those compositions into being – a professor giving the gift of time and encouragement; fellow students giving the gift of connection and support; singers giving the gift of rehearsal time and vocal talent; and Julie giving the gift of her living room keyboard. Many people committed to each other, counting on each other, to bring an All Saints’ Day concert to their community. Every gift mattered.

For the concert finale, the choir sang the second of those two anthems composed by that young man. As the song ended, a hush fell upon the room as the audience absorbed the powerful feeling that anthem evoked. There was more than just a sense of beautiful music; there was a sense of beautiful connection. All those gifts had intertwined together to create a very special gift for everyone present. In a concert about the meaning of death, the meaning of life had become crystal clear.