

I wanted to begin by thanking my Wednesday evening Bible study class. This past Wednesday I shamelessly coerced them into entering the process of writing this sermon. So if this is a poor sermon you can blame them! We took this text from Mark and talked about it. We asked lots of questions and came up with all sorts of things to say to you today. Frankly, I found the discussion to be quite interesting, and some ideas were discussed that I wouldn't have thought of on my own. With that being said, I want to say to the Wednesday night group – Don't take it personally, but I'm not using anything that you suggested! Just kidding.

Early on in our marriage Alisha and I would go to the mall in Arlington. We didn't have children at the time and had a lot of free time to do things like that. There was one problem though – I didn't and still don't like to shop. I love to shop if I know what I am going to buy and can get in a short line to buy it. Here's my shopping philosophy – get in, get it, and get out as quickly as possible. Alisha, on the other hand, likes to browse. She doesn't buy a lot of stuff, especially for herself. She just likes to shop.

One evening we were walking through the mall and she stopped in her tracks. She said, "What do you think of that red sweater?" I said, "What sweater?" She said, "The red sweater on the rack." "I don't see a sweater. Where is the sweater?" She replied, "In that store on the right. Don't you see it? It's in the back corner near the purses." It was as if she had radar locked in.

As you can imagine, I eventually found a bench. You have seen these guys before. They have that same hopeless look on their face. It's a look that says, "When is my wife or girlfriend going to come back and pick me up." Well, I must admit that on occasion I have been that guy. I figure Alisha has had to endure many different sporting events over the years with me, so the least I could do is sit on a bench while she shops.

It has been through the process of sitting on that bench that I have learned to enjoy people watching. Anyone here like to people watch? People watching is fun and it's free! Malls are good places to people watch, as are airports. Airports seem to have a wide variety of folks. That's a nice way of saying, "There are a lot of strange people passing through our airports."

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Jesus wasn't at the airport, but he was people watching nonetheless. Mark doesn't tell us why he was sitting there that day watching people enter the Temple to give their offerings. For all we know he could have been tired and just decided to stop and sit down for a while. Or maybe this was something he did on a regular basis. Maybe he was a people watcher. Whatever the case may have been, Jesus was watching people and in particular, he was watching them give their offerings to God.

Just before he sat down to people watch, Jesus was teaching in the Temple. As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers." Jesus didn't have any time or patience for those who thought too much of themselves and drew attention to themselves unnecessarily.

As many of now know I'm a big sports fan. I love football and basketball in particular. I grew up watching the Dallas Mavericks and Dallas Cowboys, and have always been a fan of both teams. Like many others I think when Tom Landry left the team so did a sense of class. Now the Cowboys are nothing more than a mediocre team, and on top of that they are paying one of the most arrogant self-centered athletes of all time – Terrell Owens. Not only is he a me-me-me kind of player, he drops half the balls that are thrown to him. His touchdown celebrations have become a mockery of the game and the concept of team. Last week when they lost to the Redskins he scored a touchdown and then assumed the fetal position as if he was asleep. Apparently, he fell asleep during a team meeting the week before and was making light of the situation. Ironically enough, later in the game he dropped a perfectly thrown touchdown pass that would have won the game. I love the Cowboys and want them to win, but deep down I kind of like it when Owens makes a fool out of himself!

Needless to say, Jesus wouldn't be wearing any T.O. jerseys around town. He had no patience for arrogance and warned his disciples to beware of those who made a show of their faith.

As Jesus was people watching, something remarkable happened. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle, people coming and going, there appears a woman. We don't know her name. We don't know if she knew Jesus. We don't know where she came from. All we are told is that she is a

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poor widow who put two copper coins in the treasury. On the surface it sounds like there is nothing to it. There were many people going to the Temple that day to worship and give their offerings. The fact that she was one of them is not surprising or unusual. But what is surprising is Jesus' reaction to this woman. There was something about her and the way she made her offering that prompted Jesus to turn her into a living, walking lesson of stewardship and faith.

Jesus called his disciples together and said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 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."

Jesus had seen enough of all the self-important rich people who wanted to make a show of their faith. He couldn't stand it anymore and when this humble widow came to make her offering he just had to say something about it. It seems as if it was such an oddity to see something like that. There were many people coming and going and putting in large sums of money, but there was just this one poor widow who, at least through the eyes of Jesus, knew what sacrificial giving was all about. Jesus was so moved by this amazing act of generosity and faith that he just couldn't help but share with his disciples. There are so many layers to this story and so many directions to go with it, but I think one thing we should not overlook is the fact that Jesus was paying attention to an ordinary person in an ordinary setting on an ordinary day. It mattered to Jesus what this poor widow was doing with her life. While most everyone else could have cared less about this woman, Jesus cared deeply for her and was impressed by her act of faith. Jesus was paying attention to her even though she wasn't paying attention to him.

I have been fortunate to have known two sets of great grandparents. One of my great-grandparents was named Buddy. He was my mother's grandfather. To this day I don't know what his real name was. We just called him Buddy. Buddy fell off a ladder and died when I was five years-old, but I still remember him and in particular two times I shared with him.

The first thing I remember about Buddy was his chewing tobacco. Buddy loved to chew tobacco. One summer afternoon we were visiting Buddy in Shreveport, and I was playing in the front yard. Buddy came outside and we started talking. I don't remember what we were talking

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about, but I'll never forget when he reached into his pocket and took out his chewing tobacco. He pulled out his pocket knife and cut off a piece of the tobacco. Then he extended it towards me and asked, "Do you want to try some?" Remember, I was five at the time and no, my mother was not present at the time. I tried the tobacco and immediately spit it out. It tasted horrible. To this day I think he gave me some to taste so I wouldn't want any later when I grew up. If that was his goal then I can say it worked!

The other time I remember sharing with Buddy was at our house in Dallas. He and my great grandmother had come to visit us and I was in the process of learning how to ride a bike. My parents had just taken off the training wheels a few days earlier and I was trying to get the hang of riding a bike. Needless to say, it was a frustrating experience for me. I struggled and struggled to get balanced on the bike. At one point I fell off the bike and was so mad that I got up off the ground and kicked the bike. I was a real smart kid – then I not only had a scraped knee but a sore foot as well. I thought I was alone when I kicked the bike, but as things turned out I wasn't. Buddy was sitting on the porch with my older sister Jodilynn while all this was happening. Jodilynn was laughing uncontrollably as her little brother made a fool out of himself. Buddy was not laughing. Buddy looked at me and said, "Pick up the bike, get back on it, and ride it."

You just never know who might be watching you. If I would have known that Buddy was watching me attempt to ride the bike I wouldn't have kicked it and I certainly wouldn't have said what I said when I fell off!

God is watching us right now. God has been watching us from the day we were born and is watching every move we make everyday of our lives. For some that is an intimidating idea. For those who have this image of an angry God who wants to punish us at every turn, it can be discomfoting to think of a God who watches us throughout the day. But for those who see God as a God of grace, it can be one of the most comforting thoughts. To know that God cares enough about you and me to pay attention to even the most menial details of our lives is beyond words.

This story about the poor widow says many things, but it says one thing loud and clear – when we give all we have and are to God in a spirit of humility, not wanting to impress anyone, then God is pleased and smiles upon us.

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Think about your life. Think about your gifts. Think about the ways in which God has called you to serve and be a blessing, and imagine God's reaction as you love and serve others in your own unique way. What are you doing with what God has given you? Are you giving of yourself out of your abundance or out of your scarcity? The poor widow gave something out of nothing, and you and I can give something out of nothing as well. There are some days we just don't have the faith we should have or the love or the forgiveness. We have about a penny's worth and it feels inadequate, but it's never inadequate when we give it in the right spirit and give it to God.

Everyone has been given a penny this morning. I want you to look at that penny and instead of seeing it as money, see it as a symbol of your faith. See it as that little mustard seed Jesus was talking about. See it as whatever you have to offer God and then give it over to God. Just like your faith, you can do whatever you want with your penny.