



COMMUNITY  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

MINISTER  
DAN YEAZEL, PREACHING  
KIM JOHNSON

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32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
November 12, 2006

Mark 12:41-44

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### *Foolish or Faithful*

Our New Testament lesson is from Mark. It is the story of the Widow's Mite and this story comes up only once in three years in the lectionary cycle of suggested readings. Let us listen for God's word as it comes to us.

The pastor of large Presbyterian Church in an upscale suburb of Atlanta, tells a story about a group of men in the locker room of a private golf club. A cell phone rings, and a man picks it up and the conversation that follows goes something like this: (SKIT)

The cell phone conversation was a bit of fun and foolishness. It is easy to laugh with him as he makes commitments with other peoples' money. If the funds were coming out of his own wallet, who knows how "giving" he might be? Our story this morning is about a women spending everything she has, not on herself, but giving it to the church.

It is likely you've heard this story from scripture before. The "widow's mite" is often read when it is time to talk about

money and giving to the church. I will talk about that in the sermon this morning. However I'd like to do something a little different this morning. Our text is a conversation between Jesus and the disciples about giving to church and I'd like to start out by inviting you to have a conversation with the person next to you (or a few people near you) and consider in what ways this woman can be seen as foolish and in what ways this woman can be seen as faithful as she puts her last two coins in the offering box. This will only be a few minutes, so please don't exchange recipes or have the conversations you can have downstairs, please do try to name ways that she can be seen as foolish and how she can be seen as faithful. Take a few minutes to do that. (Discussion time)

In what ways Foolish / in what ways Faithful? Does anyone have any observations they would want to share?

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I imagine you came up with many more good thoughts on each side of this question. On one hand we can ask "how could this poor woman give everything away?" What was she thinking? And perhaps we might ask, if you're going to give it all away "why would she give it all to church?" Did she really think that God needed her two small coins? Did she think that somehow her gift would actually matter in the big scheme? We don't know what she was thinking, we are left to guess and wonder at her motivation.

But she is motivated, she acts and Jesus calls our attention to her and her gift. He says hers is the greatest gift. There is something about her actions that Jesus notices and lifts her up as an image of faithfulness. For two thousand years her "two cents worth" has been talked about. And remember that of all the things that Jesus taught about, money was second only to "the Kingdom of God". Jesus often spoke about money.

At Community Presbyterian there will be a good deal of talk about money this coming week. First off, a few words about this year's stewardship campaign. In a nutshell, the commitments for 2007

look exactly like 2006. Overall, there was a slight increase in giving, but it was just enough to cover the loss of income from those members who died or moved away this past year. We have 711 members that form 426 giving or pledging units and so far this year we have received just shy of 200 pledge cards.

On Tuesday, the Trustees will look at a draft budget that pulls together all the requests from the various committees of the church. On Thursday the Session will approve a budget and present it at the congregational meeting next Sunday. The congregation will hear and act on terms of call for the pastoral staff. This week Trustees and Elders will make recommendations and decisions, and they will consider what is faithful and what is foolish for CPC in 2007. I'd like to speak to some of the issues they will be facing.

At the moment projected expenses are about 24 thousand dollars greater than the expected income. That is a little more than 10,000 more than the deficit we started out with last year. CPC has often adopted a deficit budget, the presumption is that new members will join or that special gifts may arrive during the year. And that does happen. The increases in this year's budget are primarily from three areas, personnel, Christain Education and Mission. The

personnel committee is recommending changes to move all staff into fair pay ranges. The mission committee has identified new local missions that need our support and the Christian Education committee is expanding programs like Weds night supers and adult education.

Your congregational leaders will make choices. There are a couple of responses. One is to Leave the budget as is. We can head into next year with the expectation that we will grow some and we could use operational reserves as needed next year. Historically we have not used reserves as much as anticipated with deficit budgets. People in the congregation have tended to respond to year end requests to help balance the budget. We are all familiar with the Christmas letter saying your church needs you! Is that foolish or is that faithful?

A second option rather than wait until December to ask for additional donations, they could ask the congregation to consider a slight increase to their pledge for the coming year. If each pledging unit gave just \$2 more per week we would have the deficit covered. Or if every member committed to paying the per-capita apportionment of \$23.50. If every member would do just that. We could fulfill all our plans. Is that foolish or faithful?

A third option is we can cut the budget. Session could ask committees to cut a certain number of dollars or percentages from parts of the budget. If you think it is foolish for CPC to ask more of the congregation, talk to the Trustees and talk to your elders. If you really think we are stretched too far, tell them. This is the week to do so. But if you think what the committees are asking for is faithful and you would rather not cut back our ministries then tell them. If you are enthused about what we could do with a full budget. Tell them. I for one, will be the first to go beyond my tithe, if session asks for more support. Is that foolish or faithful?

Scripture gives us many examples of extravagant giving, oil poured on Jesus feet, foolish or faithful? King David says, "I will not give offerings to the Lord that cost me nothing." We see the same conviction in our New Testament text: many gave that day and much could be done with the money received, no doubt. But Jesus praised only the widow who gave two small copper coins. His point: the one who put in the least gave the most. Why? Not because it had the greatest impact on the ability to do ministry but because it had the biggest impact on her life -- it was an expression of great love.

Like David, insisting that his worship involve the very substance of his life;

like the woman in the temple, who out of her poverty gave all she had to live on; like members of Community Presbyterian, who give generously to support the ministry of this church -- the people of God have always understood that our response to God ought to impact our lives in very real ways. The truth is, we should never expect the life of faith to be easy or be surprised that discipleship should cost us in the very center and substance of our lives -- because it does! And in our stewardship -- in our stepping up to respond to God's grace with the resources of our lives -- we show what we care for by the cost we are willing to pay. Talk to your leaders and pray for your leaders this week. Amen.