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## All You Have

*Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsobn given for the people of St. John's Episcopal Church  
November 11, 2018; Mark 12:38-44*

I told you a few weeks ago that at one point soon after I returned to what Bishop Curry likes to call “the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement,” I considered joining an intentional Episcopal community called Rivendell. This community of people had a rule of life centered on prayer and radical hospitality. I was moved by them because of the lengths to which they would go to live what they saw as the gospel. For example, one of them, who had been a Catholic nun until she became an Episcopalian, adopted five children as a single mother, all of whom had severe health or mental health issues. One of them is a beautiful person who was born without arms or legs, but who is an excellent artist, author and follower of the way of Jesus. Anyway this community and its mission really moved me, so I became what is called a postulant—a person who studies and practices their rule of life—for a period of nearly two years. During that time, I was trying to figure out how much I ought to give this community financially. The classic Christian practice is to give a tithe, or 10%, of your income to the church and to other charitable organizations, but that seemed like a lot to me at the time. So I asked the community’s leader for guidance. How much do community members usually give? How much should I give? And she looked at me and said: “Something between a penny and everything you have.”

As you can probably imagine, her answer came from today’s gospel reading from Mark, where the poor woman gives the Temple two coins worth a penny, which amount to everything she has to live on. Jesus notices and praises her, although she is probably invisible to most people and though her contribution cannot be said to have made any quantifiable difference to the keepers of the treasury at the Temple. And on the surface I think it’s easy for us to do the same. We who care so much about social justice like the Jesus who notices the poor and teaches his followers to do the same. In

fact Christianity itself has always thrived among the poor and marginalized, because it has such a radical message of hope and dignity for people. But if you go deeper into the meaning of Jesus' teaching in today's gospel text, I wonder if we would like it quite as much. Last night I was at a birthday party for my brother and sister, where I went right after Shane called me to tell me he was sick and we decided it would be cruel and unusual for him to preach today. So I was talking about this scripture with my brother who is also a preacher, knowing that sometime between last night and right now I would need to study and write a sermon. My brother told me he doesn't really like the notion of giving everything you have to one thing. He doesn't trust the notion that any one idea or person or organization deserves such loyalty that you would give everything you have for it. To him that just sounds like fundamentalism. And more deeply, if Jesus is saying that we should give and live in a way that involves sacrifice, beyond what is convenient, we have to be careful. Teachings like this almost always impact those who are poor the most, because they have no safety nets, no margins.

So what are we to make of today's gospel reading? Is Jesus teaching us to live and give in a way that is so radically generous that it becomes inconvenient, or even sacrificial? The Jesus in Mark's gospel is the one who, over and over, teaches that his own ministry is not to lead a military revolution against the Roman oppressor, but to heal the sick and blind and demon possessed, knowing that the end of his ministry will not be success but the sacrifice of his own life. So now we have to get downright uncomfortable. What are followers of the way of Jesus supposed to do with this in today's world?

Throughout scripture, there are stories of God's abundance showing up precisely where humans run out of resources. Do you remember the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish? That happens when he and the disciples have been looking for some rest, some place to get away, because they have been so fatigued by the crowds, but the crowds follow them and then they not only have to keep working but they have to also somehow feed 5,000 hungry people. In one of the Old Testament readings from today, the prophet Elijah is sent by God to a widow in Sidon, a widow who is planning to eat her last meal with her son and then die because they literally have nothing left, and God sends Elijah to them to feed themselves and him with a jar of flour and a jar of oil that never run out. In the desert after the people of

Israel are liberated from slavery, God feeds them manna and quail and provides water from the rock, when they by all rights should have died of thirst and starvation. And in John's gospel God is shown to be one who overflows with abundance and grace, a God who will grant 180 gallons of the best wine at a wedding where they've run out, to people already half in the bag.

For those of us in this country and in this congregation who have plenty, and we should be mindful that that is not all of us, we are so used to operating out of convenience and having the multiple safety nets provided by insurance and savings and supportive communities and those of us also who have white privilege, that many of us can't imagine what it's truly like to fear for our survival, to come to the end of our resources. But in a smaller way we've all been there. Every parent who faces a fifth night in a row with no sleep because their kids are sick and they had an extra work project and the sump pump failed and it snowed so they had to get up early to plow the driveway knows what it's like to be crazy tired and have nothing left. Those of us who have experienced trauma know what it is to be afraid. Those of you who have been here for a long time, who have kept this congregation going out of great generosity in pledging and offering your ministry and gifts, like John Corlett and Chad Smith going above and beyond the call of duty to clean up the kitchen ceiling that caved in this week from a water leak, have experienced what it is to give sacrificially. Our scriptures speak about the reality of God meeting us when we are empty and providing a transformation that is beyond us. The Jesus in Mark's gospel who sacrificed his life was granted resurrection and a power over death and violence that nothing could take a way.

Some friends of mine, Jeff and Kristen Kidder, started a Christian community in Frogtown, a very impoverished section of St. Paul, after having gone to Haiti and experiencing such deep connection and nourishment with people there, fellow Christians who were in poverty, that they wanted to find some way to live out a solidarity with people in poverty here in the metro. So they moved to Frogtown with a few other friends and made a commitment not to work full time, so that they could have time to cultivate friendships in the neighborhood and support especially the kids who were in the neighborhood. Time and again the Kidders have run out of resources and have been in a bind. But they tell me that also, again and again, as they have

sought to be faithful to their sense of God's call in their life, God has granted them help when they most needed it and least expected it. There is a verse in 2 Corinthians that says God's power is made perfect in human weakness, that God's grace is enough for us. Indeed everything we have is granted by God in any case, but we tend to forget that the more power and possessions we have.

I will be honest with you. When I learned last night that I needed to preach this morning, I felt a little like the widow from Sidon who was in possession of her last meal, who was then being asked to give some food to Elijah. But each of you have had situations like that, and each of us face moments in our lives every day when we have a choice between generosity and fear, a choice between being safe and taking risks in order to follow the way of Jesus. I'm not saying we shouldn't have good boundaries. We should. But our God meets us exactly where we don't have what it takes, when we aren't enough, when the best we can offer isn't worth much in the way the world measures things. This week, I'd invite you to pay attention to where you come to the end of your resources, or to the end of your comfort zone, and ask, where is God in this? What is God asking me to do in this situation? How might God turn my small offering into life for others? Our God is able to work through us when we show up and offer who we really are, whether we give a penny or everything we have.