

# More Than All

Michael J. Nielsen / General

Dependence; Faith; Sacrifice / Mark 12:38–44

That the hearers would be encouraged to depend entirely on God.

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- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

You might be expecting a stewardship sermon this morning. After all, our hymns are based on stewardship, you would even think that the Gospel reading with the Widow's Mite is pointing to a stewardship sermon. I have preached stewardship sermons on this text before. Not today. There's something far greater going on today, then just generous giving of the faithful widow. And it is going to be the theme for the next three Sundays. Here it is "Depend on God - God's got the church!". This woman gave "more than all." She put in "everything she had, all she had to live on."

The questions come up. First is the obvious, hey Jesus, you said that this woman gave more than all those who were contributing to the treasury. She put in two small copper coins which equals something less than a penny. There is no currency today that could compare to what this poor widow gave. The rich though, gave much. How can you say she gave "more than all?"

The other question is this: Why would a poor widow out of her poverty put in everything she had, all she had to live on? Why give everything to the treasury and have nothing left to live on.

The questions are honest! The questions are real. Did she give "more than all?" Well not, not by human standards. She couldn't. Yet in proportion to what she had, she did give "more than all!" She understood what the Holy God could do for her, which points us to the next question, "Why would she give everything she had, all she had to live on?" She gave everything she had, because she depended solely on God to take care of her. She gave more than all, because she depended on God.

Wow! What faith this poor widow had. I wish I could be like her. I wish I could have that character. Absolutely dependence on God. That's what you and I are called to do as Baptized Children of God. The reality is though, we fail. We depend on him when times are tough, but even at those times we struggle to fully trust. We try to take matters in our own hands. We

may even try to buy our way out of trouble with our wealth. We may see our money as security, so really we aren't depending on God absolutely.

Over the last almost 4 1/2 years, I've had my struggles. I've had my doubts. There were times that I even wondered if God was real. There were times that I wanted to quit. There were many times, actually every day that I didn't absolutely depend on God. There were times that I tried to make the church - mine. There were times that I tried to make the church do what I WANT! There were times that I offended some of you out of my own selfish desires! To all of that I have to get on my knees and confess my sin.

Over the last almost 4 1/2 years, you've had your struggles. You've had your doubts. I am sure you are in the same boat as me, and wondered if God was even real. I am guessing there were times that you just wanted to throw up your hands and tell God, "I quit," this being a Christian thing is too hard. And I know you personally are like me, You don't depend fully on God. You are sinner just as much as I am. I also know this, as a pastor, I spend a lot of time in observation mode. Observing the movements of the people, and there is one thing that I see, and that is no visible, local congregation has Absolutely dependence on God. That's the honest and that's the brutal truth. That goes for you, the people of Trinity and St. Paul as well.

And even as I have two more Sundays with you, there are going to be times in your future, especially during this vacancy process that your dependence on God is going to falter. You are going to try and take control of the situation by yourself. And when you do this, get on your knees and confess those sins before the Almighty God. Dear Saints of God, St. Paul/Trinity is not entirely your Church - it's God's Church...you are stewards and caretakers of it. You are the ones that are members of the Church called to go out and be of service to the kingdom. You aren't just stewards and caretakers...you are members of the body of Christ. So I urge as you God's Church...Be the Church into the future!

And the only way you can be the Church, is through the one that made the Church, that called you into the Church. He is the same one that Called this Faithful poor widow to give more than all of the rich and to absolutely depend on God, because she gave everything she had to live on. Dear Church, this poor widow gave more than all. You have one that has called you, that has redeemed you, that forgives your sins of failing to depend solely on God, and relying on your ways and means in your personal lives and in your life together as a local congregation. You have been given forgiveness because of Jesus Christ.

Even as Jesus Christ is teaching absolute dependence on God to his disciples, he's also revealing something. He's revealing a bit of himself. He depends solely on his Father. This text is in the Holy Week. It's a teaching that happens because in just a few days at that time, Jesus is going to go to the cross for you. And on that cross Jesus is going to give more than all...even more than the poor widow. Jesus is going to become poorer than the poor widow. He's going to give up everything, including his very life for you! He's going sacrifice everything for you! He does this out of absolute dependence on His Father and out of his great love for you, his dear people,

called, chosen, and redeemed as His Children. He does this all of out his great love for you, the very Church of God. He gives "more than all" for you out of his great love!

And the thing is has he gives up everything for you...He also is going to take it back up again! Jesus Christ on that first Easter Sunday lives again for you, so that you will have everything...not everything on this side of the resurrection of all flesh, but everything in the New Creation...and that everything is life forever with Christ Jesus. Life forever as the Saints living together in peace and harmony, singing praises before the Lamb who sits on his thrown. Jesus Christ gives you "more than all", more than anyone else could give you. More than any sinful shepherd who stands in this pulpit can give you. He gives you more because He is God!

And dear Church, because He gives you more than all, because he gives you everything...as God's dearly redeemed people, He calls you to be solely dependent on Him.

Solely dependent on him for salvation. Solely dependent on Him to take care of you. For example, last week had a great impact on me. Hearing from Janet Zinke from Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch gave me a great reminder. She reminded me that this isn't my church, this is God's Church, and God will always take care of the Church, God's Got the Church in his hands - that's his promise...and now by Church...i mean the universal Church, which you are part of. She also told a story in the bible study time, which I'm sure we've heard similar in our lives. It's similar to that of the Old Testament story of Elijah and the widow who was running out of food.

Now dear Church, Janet told a story of how a lady gave a large gift to the Ranch, larger then ever before. And why, because she depended on God and God took care of her and through circumstances out of her control she received a large amount of money, for what I remember from the story some form of electricity pole or lines going through her property.

It's the same in the Old Testament lesson, Elijah found a widow who God had commanded her to feed him, but the kicker, she had about enough flour and oil in the house to make one last meal for herself and her son and then they would starve to death. Elijah told her, "Do not fear, go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day the Lord send rain upon the earth.'" This poor widow did as Elijah had said and the Lord took care of her and her son. A miracle happened that day. We hear more about this poor widow for depending solely on God then on the widow in our Gospel, but it's true. God will take care of you. He will take care of you, because you are in His hands...it reminds me of the song, "He's God the whole world in His hands." "He's got the wind and the rain in his hands." "He's got the tiny little baby in his hands." "He's got you and me brother in his hand." "He's got you and me sister in his hands." "He's got everyone here in his hands."

He will take care of you even in this upcoming vacancy. He will take care of you amidst your struggles. He will provide you a shepherd who will care for you and love you! He will take care

of you, dear Saints. And as he takes care of you, please depend on him...and solely on him. He will provide! He will provide for you, because He gave more than all for you to save you and bring you into the family of God, the very Church!

In Jesus Name. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.