

An Attitude of Gratitude

How do you measure life?

By the number of years you've lived?

By the goals and accomplishments you have achieved?

By how much you have done to help others?

By how much money and assets you have accumulated?

Whether you have love or not?

What makes you rich? What makes you poor?

Sadly, as in the song from the musical *Cabaret*, "money makes the world go around." Even, if you're destitute, begging on the street, you are judged in terms of money – passers-by contemplating if they should toss you a coin.

Jesus had just given his last public discourse, as far as we are told, and had retired to a corner of the temple, watching people putting their money into the treasury. Unlike today, when our most common way of giving to the church involves passing the basket around, back then there was a fear/awe about religion that the first thing that people did on entering the Temple was to pay their tithe, lest God (or the priest) regard them as unwelcome there.

An Attitude of Giving

The tithe had been set in place in Moses time, when everyone gave a tenth of what they had received, harvest, livestock, money, to the priests and Levites (the religious workers of the day) for sacrifices on their behalf, for congregation potlucks, to provide the Temple workers with a living, and to provide a crisis fund for people in need. For example, it was set up that you could borrow on the money you had given to the Temple, but it was to be repaid at 20% interest. (Leviticus 27:31)

Money made the world go around, even back in Moses time. So what Jesus was witnessing had been going on for centuries – it was how their religion survived.

In the New Testament, with the founding of the Christian movement, we don't find the same legislation, because there seems to be a passion to support the growing missions. Often, we read that people had "all things in common" and gave as people in need. The churches that Paul founded would all contribute to his work and upkeep, and whenever he visited a love offering was taken.

Money made their world go around. But what was different, at least in the beginning, was their attitude – they didn't count the cost in terms of money and possessions, they counted cost in terms of lives that could be transformed. Theirs wasn't a charitable giving that merely enabled people to survive; they gave that people's lives would be transformed, that they would find strength to improve their position in life.

The Christian philosophy was to make the world a better place – through love, equity and healing. There was a desire that no one should be lacking. They had community social security – they cared about their own.

An Attitude of Justice

It was if Jesus had an epiphany moment, while sitting watching people at the treasury – something that set the foundation for the Christian movement. Here comes a woman, from her appearance he deduced her poverty. The woman gave two leptons, literally the word means “tiny thing”. It was the smallest value coin in existence. This is what Jesus noticed:

- a) she gave both coins, whereas the religious law require that she only give one (less than one if it were possible). It’s almost as if she was paying forward on account because of her devotion to God.
- b) While she gave all that she had, it made no difference to the Treasury or the people around her. She was of no consequence to them but to God she was a saint.

What we can learn from this is that:

1. there has always been a responsibility, set in place for millennia that we give to God a tithe (a tenth) of what we have earned. It is part of our obligation and worship. It’s not something that this church invented, or just something that certain groups do, it is a principle that has always existed since the foundation of organized religion.
2. It’s about attitude. Just because a person who gives 2% gives more (in terms of money) than another person who gives 20%, does not make the former a better person because of the amount they gave, indeed the person who gave less is considered more faithful because they gave more than God had required of them.

An Attitude of Charity

The standards that calibrate our 21st-century scales weigh out the gift of the poor widow and find it pathetically light, virtually meaningless. We look at the amount she gave -- both nothing and everything -- and we judge it against where she gave it -- to a temple treasury set up to perpetuate a religious life and cultic style that Jesus declared bankrupt.

But if we remove the blindfold from our eyes; if we use a set of standards not based on monetary values or worldly success ratings to view this text; then we see a devoted woman not afraid to give all she has to God. We hear Jesus proclaim that this widow has made a genuine sacrifice, has given her "whole life" because of her faith.

We look ahead to a vision of Jesus hanging on a cross, making the ultimate sacrifice, giving his "whole life" for the sake of yet another bankrupt institution known as the human race.

With the right attitude, it's not too hard to understand that the widow's mite is the might of love.

Consider Agnes Boyaxhiu, born to Albanian parents, she went to India in 1929 as a member of the Loreto Order of nuns. There she taught for many years and became headmistress of a school. In 1946, she received her "call within a call" to work with the poorest of the poor. By 1948, she had received permission to leave the Loreto order and trained in the nursing skills needed to carry out her calling. She prayed, "Oh God, if I cannot help these people in their poverty and

their suffering, let me at least die with them, close to them, so that I can show them your love" (Mother Teresa: The Early Years, 67. Cited by Caroline J. Simon).

Wasted time and energy? Wasted might? From this simple beginning, the Missionaries of Charity have grown to include more than 4,500 sisters and brothers. When she retired Mother Teresa left 755 homes and 1,369 medical clinics in more than 100 countries.

Mother Teresa's mite has might, and it's the might of love.

Consider William & Kathleen Magee, one is a plastic surgeon and the other a social service worker. Together they had the opportunity to make a very comfortable living. However in 1982 they Operation Smile; since then, it has performed surgery on 100,000 children and young adults in 30 countries to correct -- without charge --- such disfigurements as cleft palates and burn scars, while training local doctors in the procedures. Says William: "The world is changed by emotion."

Consider Paul Beyer, who simply referred to it as "the Lord's work." He was a truck driver from Leola, Pennsylvania. Yet for **35 years**, every week he drove his truck to New York City, a six-hour round trip, to deliver food to the Bowery Mission, located in one of the run down sections of Manhattan. His truck is loaded with produce, canned meats and pastries which the Mennonite farmers and businesses near his town have donated. He says that people trust him with the food he takes and that the reward is to see all the happy faces when the food arrives.

In Toronto, if you are a youth 16-24, you qualify to be placed with another youth aged 6-15 suffering from emotional, behavioral and social problems in a program called Youth Assisting Youth. Since its inception in 1972 it has helped more than 20,000 children and young teens, with a phenomenal success rate of 98 percent in keeping kids in school and out of the criminal justice system.

These are testimony to people going beyond what was required of them; but they were able to do so because others chose not to hold back on what they had. It isn't an act of solo sacrifice but a community of givers with attitude – attitude to make a difference.

Our giving should not be based on a mandated requirement, but on an attitude of love and benevolence. Our biggest expenses (MCC London) are our contribution to Christ Church for sharing this space, and the provision for a pastor.

You ask most people what the pastor does, and they'll respond "preach the sermon on Sunday." Yet what the pastor really does it to be "out" in places that you're not able to be; to speak at places and with people that you don't have time for or access to; to provide counsel and comfort to people based on experience and qualification; to take the call when you have other plans.

If it was just a great preacher you're after, then there are those more eloquent than I, but they'll cost you more (LOL), and they may have a great grasp of scripture but not a great grasp on reality. I'm not into converting people to Jesus by persuasive sermons, but by inspiring faith

through lives that make a difference. It's not our perfect theology that counts, but our willingness to go beyond what God asks of us.

How do we measure our giving? What scales do we use? Do we use the scales of love to measure life? In the earlier translations of scripture this type of love was translated charity. I wonder why it changed – maybe our understanding of charity ceased to be about love?

If we began to measure our lives by the acts of love that filled them, would we find ourselves "rich" or "poor"? As Christians, our inspiration is Christ who personified absolute love in action - that one should lay down their life for their friends. Through this action we are rich beyond imagination. Christ not only gave that we might live; Christ gave that we might give.

It's an attitude of gratitude.