

40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

DAY 39 – Giving is Good. Legalism is Bad

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, '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.'

Mark 12:41-44

I am often perplexed by politics. Especially the politics that play out around taxation. I find it incredible that there are people on minimum wages who pay more tax than some multi-national companies. Or the crazy position we are in in Australia where the government gives more money in subsidies to people with superannuation accounts with more than \$3million than they give in the aged pension.....Wha??? What makes all this really perplexing is that the minute a politician says, "Hang on, that can't be right!" there is another bunch of politicians who defend this seemingly apparent inequality to the hilt.

I have been fortunate, or unfortunate to have, at times throughout my life, been surrounded by either mathematicians or economists who, I am convinced, work in the dark arts. As my uncle, a former Professor of Mathematics at QUT once said, "Never confuse economics with accountancy."

The story of the giving widow in the Gospel of Mark is telling in this regard. The New Testament writers had many opportunities to teach and require percentage giving, yet they don't do it. They instead encouraged believers to give ALL they had to God and to others. The old law required giving 10% of the harvest to the theocratic government of Israel. It was used to care for the Levites who served in the temple and as a gift to God. The concept was one that said, "Tithe to the Temple and do what you will with the rest."

But, in Christ, we no longer live under a '90/10' arrangement. Christ's call is for His followers to prayerfully give God 100%. Not just of *what* we have, but of *who* we are. And not just on occasion, but all the time. Christ came to fulfill the Law, and everything, including each breath, is from Him and belongs to Him. From our perspective, sometimes our giving may look like a lot, sometimes it may look like a little. But when we give as God leads, we may never know the full extent of how our gifts are used for Him.

It amuses me as a Presbytery Minister when every year we come to asking congregations to give to the Combined Presbytery Mission Pool (CPMP) and the bargaining that our treasurer has to go to often just get a shaky commitment. Because, what we often find is that the congregations that are the most generous, indeed generous beyond their means are usually the congregations that flourish in the years that follow. It's not the other way around. Congregations that participate out of their poverty are usually the ones that grow in numbers. Those that fight and argue and withhold their giving are usually the ones with stagnant numbers and crumbling buildings. And the Presbytery has over 40 years of records that show this correlation time and time again.

God blesses the generous heart. Not in some legalistic "you pay for your blessings" but because we know that generosity in giving is a sure sign of a generosity of heart. A generosity of heart is what grows churches, not the money. It's never the money. But money, so central to our lives, is the clear indicator of the health of the heart.

The widow gave out of her poverty not that she expected a great reward, but because she was generous of heart. Not locked in some legalistic percentage of giving, but knowing that all that she had, no matter how small, was never hers, but God's.

PRAYER

Lord,
How long will it take for us to fully understand
That all that we are and all that we have comes from You and You alone.
We spend so much time arguing over budgets and finances
While You just get on building Your church
Open our eyes that we might stop missing the generosity of Your love
And grow ever closer to You.
In Christ's name. Amen