

NORTH MAIN UMC SERMON NOVEMBER 16, 2025 - PLEDGE SUNDAY

Why I Serve and Give

That, is an interesting statement or question that I believe that I have the answer for. I would like to say I just do it, and lots of times without even thinking about it. But truthfully, its mostly because I know what its like to be hungry and to have no money for food. No new clothes for School and no Christmas presents. I grew up in an area with minimal employment, no opportunities for any and so today's reading of Paul's letter sort of hits home for me.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Paul's Letter --

⁶ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching^[a] you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."¹¹ We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. ¹³ And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.

Matthew 10:8 (Gospel reading)

⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,^[a] drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Matthew 25:14-30

The Parable of the Bags of Gold

¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,^[a] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ ²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ²² “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’ ²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ²⁴ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸ ““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant

outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

THE WORD OF GOD...

There is an additional background to the Scripture from last week about the Widows offering. The temples had offering boxes. Not like our small plates. These offering boxes were not hidden away and brought out in the act of worship to be passed discretely around the assembled worshipers. No, these sat out in the public courts as a way for all to have access to giving, even if they were not worthy of entering into the inner courts. Nor were they simple plates with padded insides to mute the sound of coins landing on the metal. Nor were they boxes with narrow slits where you could slide your envelope into the darkness inside. These were large metal trumpet-like receptacles into which you could pour your temple money, causing a clinking and a clanking that would ring across the open court, drawing attention to any who were in the area. No doubt some would aim their largess in such a way as to make the loudest sound possible, hoping to wow the bystanders with their wealth and supposed generosity. Rich people make a great show of giving large amounts. It is tempting to use this story with everyone today to point out that their small contributions are important. The purpose of the passage appears to be to explain what "true" discipleship for Jesus was: being willing to give everything you have, even your livelihood, for the sake of God. It is worth noting, though, that at no point does Jesus explicitly praise the widow for what she has done. It is true that her donation is worth more than the donations of the rich, but he doesn't say that she is a better person because of it. Perhaps the passage is not meant so much as praise for those who give everything but a further notice to the rich and powerful. It seems that Jesus is saying that we should exist to *help the poor, not consume what few resources they have. While we do need to hear that their small money offerings and services are as valued as the bigger contributions, this story is about something else. It is about giving our all. Our themes from scripture include: accepting the values of God's kingdom; releasing the grasp of our culture; learning to give out of our abundance; and nourishing our souls with the hope that comes from God, through crying out in honest, searching prayer. We can rest in these assurances: God builds, God protects, God provides. The actions of the

destitute widow thus are perhaps not being praised, but more shown to others to act more generously.

Today is also another day also about giving. World Kindness Day 2025 is **November 13** - it is an international holiday first introduced in 1998 by the World Kindness Movement. The one day is devoted to promoting kindness throughout the world, but of course, the idea is to continue the kindness movement throughout the year! For us it is Pledge Sunday and giving of our gifts, time and talents.

The mayor of New York City during the Depression, was quite a character. He would ride the city fire trucks, take entire orphanages to baseball games and whenever the city newspapers went on strike, he would get on the radio and read the Sunday "funnies" to the children.

At any rate, one bitter cold winter's night in 1935, The Mayor turned up in a night court that served the poorest ward in the city, dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. After he heard a few cases, a tattered old woman was brought before him, accused of stealing a loaf of bread.

She told him that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick and her grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, insisted on pressing charges. "My store is in a very bad neighborhood, your honor," he said. "She's got to be punished in order to teach other people a lesson." The mayor turned to the old woman and said, "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exception - ten dollars or ten days in jail."

However, as he said this he was reaching into his pocket and pulling out a ten dollar bill. "Here is the woman's fine," he said, "and furthermore, I'm going to fine everyone in this court room fifty cents for living in a city where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. The Bailiff, collected the fines and gave them to the shop keeper."

The following day, the New York Times reported that \$47.50 was turned over to the bewildered old woman. It was given by the red-faced store owner. That's how it will be with God's world. Just when it seems that all hope is lost, and goodness and mercy shall never win, the Greatest Judge

will come to set things right, deciding for the hungry and the meek of the earth. Sometimes, people are not lazy or unwilling to help themselves, they just can't.

Since it's Giving Sunday, when we dedicate our pledges to give in the coming year, you might peel back the most obvious layer - give like the widow, not like the rich people who only drop in their spare change. Give like the people who just cannot seem to help themselves. Jesus didn't come just to *put a bandage on* our brokenness; he came to *heal* it. Jesus came to usher in a whole new system, a whole new way of living together as children of God. Jesus has been calling us into the kind of discipleship that gives up everything for the sake of the gospel. **Jesus calls us into sacrificial living, not just sacrificial giving.** Think of yourself and your part in this story as the gift itself. Where can you invest yourself? How can you contribute to God's purpose and mission? Let us not squander the gifts that God has given to each of us. We are the hands and feet of Christ. We need to do what Christ would do. If people are hungry, feed them. If they're naked, clothe them. If they're lonely, talk to them. If they're discouraged, encourage them.

Let us Pray....O Lord, we gratefully acknowledge the gifts you have given to each of us for service in your world. Gifts of teaching, healing, inspiring, challenging and creating are all among the myriad of things you have placed in our lives. Change and challenge are always difficult. We are more inclined to turn our backs on opportunities of service than pitch in to affect the needed changes that will promote healing and wholeness. Jesus has opened the doors for service to each one of us. Be assured that God's love is poured out for you and rejoice. Give us courage to be willing disciples. Help us to be people of promise and hope. In Jesus' Name, we offer this prayer. AMEN.