

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
10 November 2024

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“Give it All You Got”

Third Sermon in the Stewardship Series, *Giving for Goodness*
Part of the Annual theme, *Thriving in Goodness for Good and for GOOD*

NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.

Mark 12:39-44

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Jesus starts today’s lesson with a 30,000 foot view of the systems at work in his day. He states quite plainly that there is corruption with the folks in power. Jesus warns people that some of the scribes (the ones who are supposed to be leading the communities of faith with love, justice, and equity) are corrupt. Some of them, a lot of them, have become so elite that their egos have obstructed their empathy. They are wealthy and like being wealthy. They like to show they are wealthy by waving their money in front of others, and they show off their status by taking the best seats in the house. They flaunt their money and power with no self-awareness or self-consciousness even, as to the impact of their privilege, positioning, and power on the people who they are actually entrusted to serve. And Jesus notes a specific

unjust business practice they have: “they devour widows’ houses,” meaning, they cheated widows out of their property.

As Diana Butler Bass explains, “Scribes were important, even necessary, in this society. They were the educated class and worked in learned professions, primarily as lawyers. It was typical for a man to appoint a scribe to oversee his estate when it passed to his widow. It certainly isn’t hard to imagine that, in a society where women had no legal power, corrupt lawyers, estate managers, and bankers would enrich themselves by “devouring” the houses of widows. And the widows would have no recourse against any misdoings.”¹

So at this 30,000 foot view we see that Scribes (aka people in power) were corrupt. And

¹ Diana Butler Bass, “Sunday Musings: The Angry Widow,” *The Cottage* (10 Nov. 2024), accessed on Nov. 10, 2024 via dianabutlerbass@substack.com.

widows were the victims of the scribes' corruption *while also* being dependent on them for survival. They had no choice but make the best of the system and the situation they were in. They did not choose it, but as we'll see, nor did they have to be held captive by it.

Then, Jesus moves from the general 30,000 foot view to the particular, down on the ground, nitty gritty view. He zooms in to what is right before them: people who are bringing their offerings to the temple that day.

"The rich were making quite a show of their donations when this poor widow arrived and put in two copper coins, together worth less than a penny. Jesus criticizes the wealthy, praises the widow."²

Who was this woman? What was her story? Was she a victim of the very corruption that Jesus had just been speaking about? Had her house been devoured by one of the rich lawyers in that crowd?³

It wouldn't be farfetched for us to assume this. Lots of scholars warn of the danger of lauding this woman's generosity when

the system to which she is giving may in fact be the system that is making her poor. That may be the case, and yet. She gives anyway. Why? Could it be that even though she knows that some of the scribes are corrupt that there are still scribes in power that are not? Or could it be that she trusts that even through broken systems, God can still bring about good through the power of community? Or could it be that her two coins are a strategic act of protest, giving the last of what she has to God so that her final pennies cannot be taken by man? Whatever her reason for giving, what we do know is that for her, walking away from the very place that should be creating Good in the world is not an option. Maybe the widow's two coins are a defiant example of Good in the midst of evil, faith in the midst of fallibility, hope in the midst of despair.

Because here's another curious thing about this text. Directly after this passage in Mark 13, verse 1 we read: "*As Jesus came out of the Temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' Then*

² Buter Bass, *ibid.*

³ Buter Bass, *ibid.*

Jesus asked him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.’ Stay tuned for more on this next week, but Jesus is no wrong. In just a few decades the Roman empire will destroy Jerusalem and knock their beloved temple down again, the very one the widow is standing in today.

Why give money to the temple if it’s just going to be destroyed? Why give money to those in power if they might abuse you or use you for their own personal gain?

Well maybe this text isn’t about giving money to the Temple, or to a church, or to any institution or to any leader, corrupt or ethical. Maybe it’s about “giving it all you got” to whatever we have in this moment and whoever is before us in this moment. Faith is not housed in a building, it’s born within people. Faith is not limited to people in power, it’s alive in entire communities—even those that find themselves suffering under the policies of people in power.

I know it’s been a week y’all. And hearing a message like “Give it all you got” could ring

very hollow to people who *have been* “giving it all you got” and feeling like once again, you came up short, because others didn’t do the same. I get it. But maybe that’s why we need this good news today. Because while it is yet another potentially depressing reminder of how humanity fails to love God and love others and care for those most vulnerable and marginalized in our midst, it is also a reminder that institutions will crumble and fall (even ones that we love) and people will definitely fail us or vote differently than us (even those whom we love)—but failed institutions and fallible people (ourselves included!) are not reasons to throw out our faith, give up our hope, or stop working for God’s dream.

Our faith is formed, and sustained, *in* community and *by* community. On a week like this it’s real easy to stay at the 30,000 foot level and critique the systems and the failures and point fingers at the powerful (no matter your side politically). And there is a place for that, lest we not learn from our mistakes. But what is perhaps more healthy and healing and absolutely needed in this moment is for us to zoom down to the local level. To look at the

people nearest to us and to care for them. To see people through the eyes of humble humanity and realize that we are not each other's enemy. I know it feels like it with a country that is so divided. But we are all we have. And yes, often that means we have to find and be in community with those who see the world the same as we do because it means our humanity and dignity is honored. When we do, we find healing. But we don't live in a world where then we can just be in a bubble apart from everyone else. If we truly believe that God loves and creates all of humanity and creation, then we also must continue to believe that all of humanity and creation is redeemable and transformable—even ourselves.

We need each other, and until we really understand our dependence on one another, we will continue to pit ourselves against each another rather than protect the most vulnerable among us. Now is the time for us to be looking to the widows, to the orphans, to trans folks, to immigrants, to black women, to indigenous wisdom, to the those who are most cast aside in this moment to see how we can be community in and for them...in and for each other. There is

always room to disagree on policy, politics, and presidential candidates. There is never room to disregard or disparage people.

Did you notice Jesus was not just watching the widow in this passage. He was watching the widow *and* the powerful, rich elite. He was listening and learning from them both. And what he discerned is that “giving all you got” has nothing to do with how much money or power you have. It has *everything* to do with who you put your trust in. Your belongings or the God you belong to? Yourself alone or your community?

Earlier in the service, my husband Damon shared with you about how his grandma Burnsy raised him and his four brothers—supporting them off of her social security check. What Damon didn't share was that on Sunday mornings at mass—his grandma chose him to bet the one to put his grandma's offering in the plate each week—which was, I'm assuming, an amount not unlike the two small copper coins the widow in today's text dropped in the treasury.

How much really would there have been to spare for a

grandmother raising four boys on a social security check from being a waitress? Yet, week after week, Damon remembers, he put the money his grandma gave him in the plate. Perhaps it was a sense of Catholic duty. But I suspect it was more about a recognition that a social security check can't raise four boys but a community can.

You only give “all that you to have live on” if you truly believe that what you're giving to is “all that can bring you life.”

And that is certainly what a grandma caring for four orphan boys in New Jersey would believe about her local Catholic parish and it is certainly what a widow in Jerusalem who had lost her husband would believe about her temple. Scripture is clear—the people of God are to prioritize the care of the widows and orphans. From Exodus (22:22-23) to Deuteronomy (24:19; 27:19) to Psalms (82:3; 68:5; 146:9) to Isaiah (1:17) to Jeremiah (22:3) 49:11) to Zechariah (7:9-10) to Mark (12:40) to 1 Timothy (5) to James (1:27)—all across Scripture—there is no mistaking that if a woman or child is in need, the people of God are

their providers, their protectors, their advocates and champions.

Back in her day, the widow in today's text—a woman who no longer had a man providing for her—she needed the temple community for her survival and her dignity, even for her social connections with other women. *Of course* she put her two coins into the treasury, because in giving all she had to live on, she knew that the community, in return would give her everything *she needed* to life for—faith, *and* a future. Those two coins are not just an offering, they are her hope and her belief in the community that would (or should) care for her. She “*gives it all she's got*” because she knows *the community is all she has*.

The question is: does the community have *her*? Does the community understand its responsibility to her? Does the community know that the women's two coins are her hopes and her dreams and her livelihood, or do they see her meager offering as just pocket change that won't really help pay for anything, especially when compared to the large sums that everyone else is giving?

This is Jesus' point, of course, to his disciples. This widow is giving it all she's got, *all that* she had to live on and for—and that matters when it comes to faith. The amount is secondary to the attitude. The financial value secondary to the faithful vision.

As Jesus sat and watched people make their gifts, the large sums from rich people were not moving to him. They did not require a sacrifice; they did not speak anything about dependence on community; they did not indicate that their givers truly understood that be the people of God is to be a people who truly believe that the temple, or the church today, is the agent of change and transformation in the world...of communion and care for the vulnerable.

This is the last public teaching moment in Jesus' ministry in Mark's gospel. He's heading into the last week of his life. He will have another lesson soon, building on this act from the widow...where he shows them, again, what it looks like to "give it all you got." He will break bread and say, "*this is my body given for you.*" He will pour wine and say, "*this is my blood, my life force poured out for*

you." "*Eat and drink this in remembrance of me.*"

Jesus, before his very body is broken on the cross, will say—"*all that I have, all that I am, I'm giving it to you, and to the world.*" This broken, yet beautiful world. I'm giving you my all. All that I have.

EVEN THOUGH the world will let me down and let you down...

EVEN THOUGH the systems and empires will be corrupt...

EVEN THOUGH the temple will fall and the church will fail...

EVEN THOUGH there will be suffering and pain...

EVEN THOUGH the rich will not care for widows and orphans, and the powerful will not meet the needs of the people...

EVEN THOUGH the evil and sin in the world will be overwhelming and never ending...

EVEN THOUGH the most marginalized will be pushed further to the margins...

EVEN THOUGH the ones who use my very name and call on it will do so without listening to what I say...

EVEN THOUGH people will continue to believe in systems that maintain power and protect wealth...

EVEN THOUGH people will oppress those who are simply loving the people they love...

EVEN THOUGH people will disparage those who are living into the very identity I created them with...

EVEN THOUGH people will not see all bodies as equal and worthy of care...

EVEN THOUGH people will use borders and papers as a means of legitimizing or legalizing some over others, forgetting that I myself was a refugee as a baby and I descended from a line of migrant people whose Promised Land was only reached by crossing seas and borders...

EVEN THOUGH people will fund more swords instead of beating them into plowshares...

EVEN THOUGH you will look at people you love and be

mystified as to how they can see the world differently...

EVEN THOUGH the anger at being unseen, unheard and devalued will be visceral...

EVEN THOUGH grief will come and come again and compound and the losses will sometimes make you want to give up...

EVEN THOUGH the people will pray *'thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'* and yet will vote for empires on this earth to save them, instead of choosing my way of love...

EVEN THOUGH ALL OF THIS IS TRUE...: *"This is my body, broken for you, my broken, yet beautiful world. This is my blood, poured out for you, my broken, yet beautiful, world."*

EVEN THOUGH the empire will crucify me, and EVEN THOUGH you, my closest disciples, will betray me and abandon me, fall asleep on me and deny you ever even know me: *"This is my body, given for you. This is my love, poured out for you."*

EVEN THOUGH you do not understand that right now you see through a glass dimly and cannot yet see face to face,
“This is my body, shared with you. This is my loving life, poured out for you, overflowing...”

EVEN THOUGH there is no sense to be made of all that is senseless... *“This is my body, broken for you. This is my blood, my love,, poured out for you...over and over and over again...”*

My love for you, Jesus says, is not predicated on you understanding it, or voting for it, or even liking it. My love for you—and for all humanity—is unconditional and unstoppable. And if you can put my Love above all else, you will be unstoppable too.

Jesus, through his very life and example, shows us that we do not pour out our lives because we want to “win” or have “our candidate or party win”—we do not pour out our lives because there is some guarantee it will “fix things” or “go our way,” we do not pour out our lives because we agree with what people in power are doing—we pour out our lives and *we give it all we got* because the *only way*

to live is *for* Love, *with* Love, and *in* Love. Love is what nourishes (bread). Love is what brings refreshment and joy (wine). Love is what connects (the Table). Love is what sacrifices (coins). Love is what transforms (tomb). Love is what renews (resurrection). Love is what fuels Hope. And Change. And Faith.

And Calvary, Love is not something that we budget for in a reasonable manner, seeing how much we can give of it without affecting our daily lives too much.

Love is what “we give with all that we’ve got.” Because in the end, what else do we really have?

We cannot rely on governments to love our people and to love them well. I’m not saying there is not disappointment in the government not loving our people throughout history. And I’m not saying there is not real fear and concern to be had about plans like Project 2025. And I’m not saying there’s not a responsibility to hold our elected officials accountable.

What *I am saying* is that Jesus has always told us that the Community of Love would not

be created by the rich people in charge, nor would it be sustained by institutions or systems, nor would it be contained within the walls of a temple or church. Rather, we've always known it would bubble up with the Spirit...it would rise up as Resistance!

We are not infallible. We will fail. And the systems and institutions that we think might work or help will crumble and fall. But that does not mean we give up on Love because Love never fails. And we, we are agents of love as the community of Christ in the world and we have a new chance each day to try again.

We have to "give it all we got." Now, more than ever, the world needs communities like Calvary that put radical, inclusive, inconvenient, messy, welcoming, healing, transformational, Love—above all else.

Love comes through each and every one of us giving it all we got...Giving for Goodness... putting every last coin we have into the treasury of the Common Good and saying, "*Here you go.*" "*I'm giving it all, because honestly, if I don't...we'll never know what could happen.*"

Each of us has metaphorical coins that we hold tightly to for fear of what might happen if we let go. We think that gripping them will ensure we'll be okay, but what if it's only in letting go that we will finally realize the depth and breadth of God's love and the absolute essential nature of community?

If we don't let go and love, will we miss the opportunity to make the Dream of God's kin-dom a reality here on earth? We very well might.

Dreams do not happen in isolation. Imagining God's kin-dom on earth does not happen as individuals. It is inherently communal. It is impossible to care for ourselves and to care for the world apart from communities of love.

What Jesus knows and what he's teaching us in this moment in Mark (*point to Bible*) and this one here today (*point to congregation*) is that when a community *gathers* in the *name* of God and *gives* for the *purposes* of God, they *generate Good* in the world.

A Christ-like community holds "the good of the whole" at the 30,000 foot view, while serving "the good of the person right in

front of me” need by need, moment by moment. And that’s what Calvary strives to do. That’s the kind of community we are. We love. I can’t stand up here and promise you what 2025 will bring. What I can promise you is that this community will be here loving together and living together and pulling together and serving together and creating good in the world together. Our challenges are forever flexing and changing, but our God is steadfast with mercies that are new every morning. Even the mornings that are full of mourning.

As David Von Drehle wrote in an opinion piece this week, *“The election is over. It’s only the end of the world if we choose to make it so.”*⁴

Or, as author and scholar Ibram X. Kendi posted on Instagram this week, *“The best way to protect ourselves from what’s to come is for us to construct what is to come.”*⁵

Or as social scientist Brené Brown posted this week, *“Hope is a powerful antidote to despair. What’s interesting,*

*however, Is that hope is not an emotion (C.R. Snyder). Hope is a cognitive-behavioral process. It’s about having a goal, a pathway to achieve that goal, and a sense of agency or “I can do this.” Right now, the thing that is helping the most is micro-dosing hope. [Even if you have no access to big hope right now], how can you micro-dose hope to those around you? How can you stay committed to kindness and courage and caring for others in your community regardless of the choices made by others? Doing the smallest next right thing is hard, but sometimes it’s all we got.”*⁶

So toss those two coins in Calvary.

If you’re looking for the smallest next right thing to do, give to *this community*. Give to the creation of God’s dream of love through the micro-dosing of hope that Calvary gives to you and to our world.

Calvary is a place of Beginnings. Of Healing. Of Hope. Of Help. Of Beauty. Of Inspiration. Of Service. Of Advocacy. Of Communion. Of

⁴ David Von Drehle, “Opinion: Politics, a love story,” *The Washington Post* (5 Nov. 2024), accessed at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/11/05/2024-harris-trump-politics-what-comes-next/> on Nov.10, 2024.

⁵ Instagram post from @ibramxk on Nov. 9, 2024.

⁶ Instagram post from @brenebrown on Nov. 9, 2024.

Community. Of Caring. Of Compassion. Of Curiosity. Of Challenge. Of Learning. Of Growth. Of Faith Formation and Faith in Action. We are a place of humor and fellowship and fun. We are not perfect. We are people. We will fail and we do. What makes us different than other institutions and people that fail is that we have a love-centered faith, a Christ-centered hope, and God-sized dreams serve together as our north star, our moral compass, always re-routing us back to our mission and vision, to be Open to All, Closed to None, back to God's dream of the beloved community in its *fullness* here on earth.

And because we believe that God does not give up on us, we do not give up on one another.

The widow didn't "give all that she had to live for" because the system was perfect. She gave it her all because she needed the people, even in their imperfection. And we, Calvary, in our diversity and in our differences, and in our common commitments and call, we need each other. And the world needs us.

A scholar and writer that I draw on a lot in these days is Eddie Glaude, Jr. He reminded me this week of James Baldwin's powerful words from his book, *Nothing Personal* — which sets atop my desk near my prayer books. Baldwin, in his poetic, prophetic way, writes:

"I know we often lose, and that the death or destruction of another is infinitely more real and unbearable than one's own. I think I know how many times one has to start again, and how often one feels that one cannot start again. And yet, on pain of death, one can never remain where one is. The light. The light. One will perish without the light..."

For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out."⁷

⁷ James Baldwin, *Nothing Personal* (Beacon Press: Boston) 1964.

Eddie Glaude, Jr. ties Baldwins's words together with a call for us all: "Pull your people close. Let's love each other through this madness because we have to, the storm is here, the sea has risen, and we must survive."

Calvary, let's pull our people close, and let's pull ALL the people of God close too. For nothing is fixed. And we must hold on to each other, and create a tangible good that the world can hold onto right now. The Light is shining through you, through this place, through all of us together. How bright can we make the Light? How deep can the love we share be? How wide can we swing the doors open? How many of us can "give it all we got" for the sake of "all that matters" in this moment in this place?

Let's learn from the widow. Because withholding with we have and worrying about what we don't have will not save us. But "giving it all we got," even if all we got is some grief, frustration, despair, and a pocket of dusty coins—just might. It'll at least make a difference in the dream coming true.

Let's trade our doubts for God's dreams, let's see what Love can do in and through Calvary. Now is our time to give it all we got.

As Carrie Newcomer sings, "If not now, tell me when? We might never see this moment or place in time again, if not now, if not now, tell me when?"⁸

Amen.

⁸ Carrie Newcomer, "If Not Now" c. 2010.