Widow’s Offering February 14, 2021

**Bible Verses:** Luke 21:1-4

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 342 to 345

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Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **It’s not about how much you give.**

Although both church and culture tend to lift up and value major financial donors, this passage is a reminder that ultimately our giving is both particular and personal. The widow’s offering has long been associated with kids due to the relative modesty of her gift – similar to the gifts of coins and dollars that kids often bring to children’s church – but the reality is that she bears resemblance to most church members. Most of us don’t have the ability to give massive amounts but we should never make the mistake of thinking that what we give doesn’t matter. It does – to us, to God, and to others. We all have an ability to make an impact in someone else’s life, and that is an awesome responsibility that we should never take for granted.

* **We’re called to find small ways to give and serve God and others.**

Given the paragraph above, one of the things that our faith calls us to is to think about ways that we give and serve all throughout our week – not just on Sundays! We sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that serving God requires giving in fairly defined ways: serving the poor and hungry, advocating on behalf of those who are too often ignored, and contributing what we can to the offering plate. All of those things are indeed great, but we more frequently are asked to give in the “little way” popularized by Therese of Lisieux: “*Love proves itself by deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers… every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love”.*

By viewing everything that we do as an opportunity to show love, even the simplest of actions can be seen as a way to serve God.

* **The role of giving and living generously in our faith.**

Recently, I’ve been reflecting on the idea that living through a spirit of generosity is one of the central aspects of our faith. We tend to hear the word “generous” and think exclusively about money (which, to be fair, is the central focus of this passage!), but generosity comes in many different forms. We can be generous in the way that we invest time in others, or in our willingness to engage in things that they love. We can be generous in being the first to share our doubts, fears, and failures so that we can remind others that they are not alone in those things. We can be generous in the way we give one another grace for the mistakes that we make – inspired by the way we have been forgiven by God. In all of that – and more – we can live generous lives.

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
	+ Younger kids: Are you giving out valentines today/this week?
	+ Older kids: Highs and Lows from the past week
* **Does anyone here receive an allowance or earn money from doing chores? What are things that you can do with money?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* Today, we are learning about a short passage from the Bible in which Jesus praises a woman who shared what little she had with others.
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
	+ You’ll need to screen share the passage for the day in Zoom.
	+ Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
	+ Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* Do you think the widow would have been surprised that Jesus said that she gave more than others? What did Jesus mean by that?
* Why do you think we talk about money and giving a lot at church? Why was it important to Jesus to share some of what we have?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* Who is someone in your life that you would describe as being generous? Is being generous just about giving money, or are there other ways to be generous too?
* Kids may not have as much money as adults, but that doesn’t mean that how you spend/save/give your money doesn’t matter! How can the widow be an example for how all of us use what we have?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* Today in worship, Fourth Church is celebrating its 150th anniversary as a congregation! 150 years is a long time and the church has seen a lot… what do you think life would have been like back then? What about church would have been different, and what would have been the same?

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions**

* Does anyone here receive an allowance or earn money from doing chores? What are things that you can do with money?
* What does it mean to be generous?
* Who is someone in your life that you would describe as being generous?

**Fun Activity**

* It’s been a bit since we’ve played a good guessing game with drawing, so feel free to play several rounds of Pictionary with the kids using the screen share and annotate function on Zoom.
* (Explain that you’ll start drawing and kids need to shout out guesses of things based on the Bible story from today – start with a few easy ones, followed a few tough ones!)
	+ Coins
	+ Piggy Bank
	+ Temple/Church
	+ Jesus
	+ Rich and Poor
* Play as long as kids are having fun, then transition to the Bible questions.

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* Do you think it was hard for the widow to give so much of her money to help others? How do you think she felt after giving it to help others?
* Why do you think we talk about money and giving a lot at church? Why was it important to Jesus to share some of what we have?

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Therese of Lisieux**

On a day when we are remembering the power of humble faith, few exemplified that spirit more than Therese of Lisieux – the “Little Flower” who was nonetheless named by one Pope as being “the greatest saint of modern times”.

Extremely frail and sick at birth, Therese wasn’t expected to live but managed to recover and rejoin her family after 15 months of living with a caretaker. She grew up in an extremely religious household – both of her parents were heavily involved in the Catholic Church and all four of their daughters would go on to be nuns. However, following the unexpected death of her mother and her closest sister leaving to become a nun, Therese began to have nervous breakdowns before she was even 10 years old.

This continued for several years, but at the age of 13 on Christmas Eve, she suddenly had a profound sense of calling into ministry. She tried to join a convent but was rejected due to her age – nonetheless, she continued to advocate to become a member and was finally admitted at the age of 15.

Although she had dreamed of becoming a saint, Therese began to be disillusioned after 6 years at the convent by how little she felt she had done, as well as feeling she was unable to practice a true selfless love. One night while studying the Bible, though, she was struck by the idea of a “little way” – in her words: “*Love proves itself by deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers… every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love”.*

This “little way” was inspiring to her, giving her a new sense of purpose. Tragically, however, she soon fell ill from tuberculosis and died at the age of only 24 – only to have her order publish the extensive writing and journaling that she did on this topic of “little service”. This writing ended up being her legacy, helping and inspiring millions to serve God by the “little way”.

Crafts / Activities

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**Valentine’s Day Love to Pieces**

**(Ages 3+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Markers/Crayons

Instructions:

* The Widow’s Offering doesn’t have many craft options, so we’re leaning hard into Valentine’s Day this month – plus, you’re more than welcome to use the Lenten crafts that we mailed out as well!

**Valentine’s Day Heart**

**(Ages 5+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons
* Scissors

Instructions:

* You can use this handout as a simple coloring sheet, or you can also cut out the hearts and use them as a template to cut hearts out of construction paper for a more colorful pop!

**Valentine’s Day Word Search**

**(Ages 7+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This word search is based on 1 Corinthians 13 – you’ll need to find all of the bolded words describing what it means to truly love.

Biblical Background – Widow’s Offering[[1]](#footnote-1)

It would be difficult to write an entire page about these short four verses from Luke 21, so this instead is an opportunity to reflect on the wider themes of wealth and poverty that appear throughout the Gospels, particularly in Matthew and Luke.

It will come as no surprise that Jesus consistently advocates for helping those who are poor – passages like Matthew 25:31-46 (“I was hungry and you gave me food”) make that abundantly clear, as well as Jesus’ famous words in Luke 6:20 (“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven”). We should be clear that Jesus is not suggesting that being in poverty is a blessing; rather, he is expressing concern and caring for those who are poor.

However, the Gospels’ view on having money is slightly more nuanced than the simple “being rich = bad” equation that it is sometimes reduced to. Famous passages like Mark 10:25 (“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God”) may give off that impression, but the crux of the issue seems to be one of priorities.

In Matthew 6:21 (“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”) and Luke 16:13 (“You cannot serve both God and wealth”), we see Jesus make clear that serving God and others is our primary calling, not amassing wealth and resources for ourselves. This stands in obvious contrast to the loathsome theology of the “prosperity gospel”, but also to our wider culture which lifts up obtaining wealth as a worthy goal in and of itself. Instead, we are called to use what we have – whether it is sizeable or modest – to benefit those around us.

Jesus is not celebrating the widow’s poverty in this passage – nor is he speaking ill of the rich people who are also donating. Instead, he is acknowledging that this widow is living out the idea of “where her treasure is, there her heart is”. Though her means were modest, she gave generously of what little she had because she trusted in the importance of putting God first and caring for others.

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)