

A Sermon Preached at Maple Street Congregational Church, UCC  
Danvers, MA  
Rev. Kevin M Smith  
November 11, 2018  
Mark 12:38-44

### ***Value: Giving from the Heart***

Two friends were walking through the desert. At one stage in their journey, they had an argument and one friend slapped the other one. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything he wrote in the sand, “Today my best friend slapped me.” They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to have a wash. The one who had been slapped got stuck in a mire and started drowning, but his friend saved him. After he had recovered from his shock, he wrote on a stone, “Today my best friend saved my life.” The friend who slapped and saved his best friend asked him, “After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write in stone, why?” The other friend replied, “When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it.” (<http://www.babamail.com/content.aspx?emailid=27483>)

After hearing this story, one thought that came to my mind was—what do I value in my life? What do you value in your life? Think about this for a minute. After considering what is of value to you, ask yourself why do you place value on it, or who?

When I worked in Congress, my boss, Rep. Les AuCoin, used to have a lot of town hall meetings. These are meetings back in the district where people who voted for or against you could attend and ask you lots of questions, any questions about anything. Most politicians who value their jobs do these town halls. It’s a way to show people you care, and a way for the politician to get a sense of what people they represent are thinking and concerned about. And, both the politician and the voters get a sense what each of them value. My boss was a member of the appropriations committee in the US House of Representatives. This was the most powerful committee in the House because it decided how every tax dollar you give the government is actually spent. Federal agencies can only spend the money the appropriations committees give them. My boss sat on the Defense and Interior Appropriations subcommittees. Every year he and I or another legislative aid sat in committee sessions called “mark-ups.” In these mark-up sessions we literally had a line item budget sitting before us on our desks. The committee members would go through each line item. In the Defense Appropriations subcommittee, which spent the most money, that line item budget was HUGE! Those mark-up sessions on the Defense subcommittee usually took a week or longer to complete. Every member of that subcommittee sooner or later had to show their hand on what they valued and say why that item should be valued by the country.

I bet that you do this yourself. Every household has a limited amount of money to spend or save each month. (Well, every typical household.) We all budget how much we are going to, or have to, spend on food, medicine, gas for the car, and so forth. If we are

fortunate, we have some money left over to spend on things we like to do or buy or invest in. My boss, the Congressman, used to tell people at all these thousands of town halls he did over his career that “a budget is a statement of your priorities.” The federal government budget and your home budget is a statement of what you value.

There are a lot of people in this church I know who value the education of their children and they work hard and sometimes take out loans to send their children to college. They value giving their children a good start towards a successful, meaningful career. There are a lot of people in this church who spend money that would otherwise go for buying things that give them pleasure or buying experiences that are fun, but instead, they give some of that money to the church. They value this church. Whatever it is that they get from voluntarily participating in and giving to in this place is of value to their lives.

So, what we give our money to is a statement of what we value. Another example of what we value is, of course, what we spend our time doing. Think about how you spend every minute of every day and think about what you do with your time. The answer you come up with is another way of discerning what you value in your life. Now, let's talk about this story of the widow's “mite.” The wealthy powerful folks in the synagogue, or we would call it church, wanted to have the best seats at the table. They wanted to make a show of the money they gave to their faith. Now, that's all well and good and in the end the place of worship did benefit from their donations and participation. But, let's think about it this way. How hard did they have to sacrifice to give the money they gave?

Now, think about the poor widow who only put the equivalent of a couple of pennies in the offering plate. How much did she have to sacrifice?

So, another way to consider and think about what you really value in your life is how much you have to sacrifice to give or to do something for someone else.

What is it in your life that you do or spend on that for which you really have to sacrifice something? Those are things you value very highly.

In the story I told to you at the beginning of this sermon the one friend who was saved from drowning in the mire of his life by his friend wrote that story in stone. The time that his friend hurt him he wrote in the sand that was forgotten and washed away in the wind. The friend who did the writing in the sand and in the stone sacrificed his pride and forgot his pain all for this friendship.

Sacrifice and forgiveness. Remind you of someone?

Jesus, who didn't need to leave his family, his job, his security, walked miles and miles never knowing where his next meal would come from just to tell people stories of God's love. He sacrificed everything to spread the Good News of God's love and forgiveness of our human brokenness. Jesus dined with outcasts and sinners and touched the untouchable all for love of all the people created by God and for the stories that people would pass along for generations and generations to us today.

Jesus gave his heart to us out of love through choice, through sacrifice, and by placing his value on all things and beings created by a loving God. You are sitting in those pews because of the people and things Jesus valued. Think about it.

And, on this day when we honor our veterans, many who are sitting in these pews today and many who have become our saints of light let us remember what they valued and what they sacrificed. May we not squander their sacrifices. Amen.

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