

## Title: **Whole Servants of God**

A pig and a chicken walked down the road. And as they passed a church, they notice that a potluck charity breakfast was under way. Caught up in the spirit, the pig suggested to the chicken that they each make a contribution. “Great idea!” said the chicken. “let’s offer them ham and eggs!” “Not so fast!” Said the pig. “For you, that’s a partial contribution. But for me, it’s a total commitment.”

In our gospel reading for today, we have a rather similar situation. But instead of a fun story about food and farm animals, the story’s about people’s precious wallets. Some people were throwing money in the offering box. The way it was set up in the temple is kind of like how things are here today. There’d be an offering box at one spot in the sanctuary. People would then throw any money they had in the collection box. But, there is one key difference between offerings back then and offerings today: the sound. The ring of metal. Bronze, brass, and copper. Imagine it. It sure wasn’t the sound of soft paper bills and envelopes that we have here today. Or online donations for that matter. Our American culture has moved away from this practice: but in that time, a coin was worth as much as the metal it was made out of. People could hear the donations. The sounds of the offerings would’ve filled the room.

Now, Jesus was watching this all play out. He sat just opposite the offering box. Listening, watching. Hearing the rich

giving their large sums. But, he doesn't react. He only observes. But then, someone shuffles in. A widow. A poor widow. This woman sheepishly walks up to the offering box, empties her pocket, and throws in two copper coins. No more than a penny by today's standards. While those two coins made the softest sound in the offering box, Jesus acts. He loudly calls his disciples over to him. Imagine the scene. The region's most famous preacher and teacher praising the penny of a poor, forgotten woman. This man who healed countless sick, the blind, lame, fed thousands and cast out demons is now thankful for a penny. Why does this widow matter so much to Jesus? What's her penny worth? Today, Jesus wants us to learn about the difference between a *partial* Christian and a *whole* servant of God.

The rich donors were offering a *part*, but not the *whole*. Maybe their motives weren't that bad at all. Maybe those rich people who gave so much truly loved God. After all, they threw large sums in the offering box. God must've mattered to them. Also, Jesus doesn't react against the rich. He simply doesn't react at all. Why doesn't he? He didn't even thank them. The thing is, the rich donors offered a *part*, and not the *whole*.

What about us? What about our gifts? Are we giving as *partial* Christians or as *whole* servants of God? Now, as I stand here in front of you today, in this beautiful sanctuary, speaking to you with a solid audio system, comfortably cool with pristine air-conditioning, with a well-furnished office down the hall: You folks

are quite generous! You've given a great *part* of yourselves. But, it is only a *part*. There's more to the story for today than just money. Is living as a Christian simply going to church on Sunday? A *partial* Christian would go to church on Sunday, but once he or she gets home, they live in a way that isn't pleasing to God. That's you and me; we all do this. *Partial* Christians take pride in themselves and what they've done. *Partial* Christians might like God but ultimately depend on themselves. They might give plenty, but in the end, everything ends up being about them. We're all guilty of this sometimes.

But, not the widow in the story for today. She didn't offer a *part*. She offered *the whole*. Everything she had. She didn't seem to be in good condition. She's poor. Her offering's no more than a penny. This widow was likely in a desperate situation. At that time, if no man was in the household, the woman had nothing. Women didn't usually go out of the home and get jobs. This widow's status, livelihood, her everything, died with her husband. She, trusting in her God, offered up *the whole* of what she had left. Jesus himself said, "she in her poverty has put in everything, all she had to live on." This widow was richer than anyone else that threw their offerings in the offering box. She believed something that the rich people didn't, that God was in complete control of her life. That's the widow's faith. It made her rich. She gave *the whole* because she trusted God to save her. This story is about way more than just money. There was no *part* of her life outside that offering box. She was not a *partial* Christian. Her *whole* life was in God's

hands. Her Heavenly Father was in full control of her life. She was a *whole* servant of God.

In the same way, Jesus put aside everything he had for you. He paid *the whole* price. He humbled himself, and became a man, just like you or me. The Son of God came in the flesh. He lived on earth. He's one of us. He lived. He was hungry. He cried. He was fully obedient to the end, death on a cross. He didn't offer a *part*. He wasn't boastful or arrogant about the great miracles he did. He was totally reliant on his Heavenly Father. In Jesus' entire earthly life, he was *the whole* servant of God. And God raised him from the dead, making him Lord of all creation. Jesus is now Lord of everything. Everything on earth belongs to Jesus, and everyone on earth is under Jesus' authority. You and me, too.

Jesus' resurrection foreshadows what will happen to all of you. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, you will too. You will be raised from the dead, being made *whole*. You'll live with Jesus forever in his coming kingdom. Jesus doesn't care for a *part* of you. His love isn't *partial*. He doesn't just love you when you're having a good day. He loves *the whole* of you. He loves you when you feel joy and contentment. He loves you when you feel sorrow and shame. And one day, Jesus is coming back again, and he will make you *wholly* perfect. That's the greatest gift Jesus gives to those who believe in him. The widow believed it. It's why she was totally reliant on God.

In the meantime, before Jesus comes back, what are we supposed to do? Should we all throw our paychecks in the offering plate? Is that what God wants from you? No. God wants something more. God doesn't care about your checkbook. He cares about your heart. God wants your *whole* life. And he has it. Think about it. He gave you a new birth, a new life. In your Baptism, God claimed you as his own. Paul in his letter to the Galatians says that, "as many of you that were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." We are nothing by ourselves, but Jesus has you *wholly* covered with his love. Nothing can ever take the gift of God's love away from you. You are all rich with the love of God. This isn't a story about you needing to do more for God. God's done everything for you already. Along with the gift of his love, he's given you much more. Everything you own belongs to God. It's all gifts from him. He's gifted you with time, talents, testimonies, and treasures. God's enabled you to do something great with these gifts: Live lives *wholly* dedicated to serving Him and His creation. And this is not a burdensome thing to do. He's enabled us to do it.

Living as a *whole* servant of God is not about just going to church on Sunday. It's only a part of being a *whole* servant. Now, it's a really big *part*. An essential *part*. But it's only a *part*. What about that coworker you know that's really struggling? What about your neighbors? That one family member? A *whole* servant of God cares about what he or she does on Monday too. Being a *whole* servant is not reserved for just an hour or so every Sunday. God has enabled each and every one of you to serve the world around

you. God put you where you are for a reason. You get to be God's love on display in someone's life. You get to smile with them when they feel joy, grieve with them when they go through hardship. Strive to be a *whole* servant of God.

So, instead of coins ringing in the money box of the temple, we now have a different offering that God wants us to use: serving Him in His creation. And as we learned in our second reading for today, God loves a cheerful giver. The days of copper, bronze and brass, ringing in the temple are gone. Instead, let's have our time, talents, testimonies, and treasures ring in the ears of the community. Not bragging in ourselves, but in a way that brings glory to God. After all, God is the one doing the good work in us. He's enriched us to be generous in every way. God's set us up to be able to do this. He uses us broken, flawed tools to accomplish great things. Even when those things seem as small and insignificant as a widow giving away pennies. Give bacon, not just eggs. Give your time to Him in prayer, and to the service of those around you. Use your own unique talents to serve those around you. Share your testimony, the story of your faith, to the world around you. If you have the means, give of your treasures to the glory of God. Serve your own little corners of his creation. Demonstrate God's love to this world. Strive to live as a *whole* servant of God, reliant on him in all that you do.