

Is it worth it? It seems the most important question we can ask. Is it worth it?

Is it worth it for you to get out of a warm bed and come here today?

Is it worth it for a community to vote to tax themselves to support schools?

Is it worth it for a soldier to risk his life in a war in Iraq?

Is it worth paying attention to diet and exercise in order to live a little longer?

Is it worth the effort in serving the congregation through teaching Sunday School?

Is it worth it to sacrifice for a college education for a child, or to sacrifice a night's sleep for a crying baby?

Is it worth taking notes and paying attention in class and doing homework and studying for the tests?

Is it worth it?

Much of life is lived by habit – most days you and I do not ask whether it is worth it to go to work – we just do.

So the soldier does not ask whether it is worth it – he simply is faithful to his comrades – he depends on them and they on him.

And the mother holds the crying child and does not ask whether the child will somehow pay her back for all of this – she just gets through it.

And maybe that widow Jesus told about was just doing the same that day – dropping the two copper coins out of her hand and into the offering as she had done every day since her husband had died. The only difference being that these two were her last. At least I would like to think that is the way it was. All that Jesus tells us about her is that she gave this offering and these words, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

She gave most, Jesus says, but Jesus did not say whether it was worth it.

You say, that does not matter, just what was in her heart. Well, that may be true but when my grandmother was writing checks to every charity that called her on the phone it mattered to me that she would choose wisely. I did not want her good will abused by someone's greed.

Jesus seems to have the same concern – in the first part of our gospel reading he warns against religious leaders who are only in it for the show and for their own advantage. They take the best seats, they say long prayers, they devour widow's houses – they will receive the greater condemnation – Jesus declares.

And yet it seems that this widow may have given her last two coins to support them. How tragic!

And the very next thing that happens with Jesus and his disciples is that as they leave the temple, the disciples comment on the beautiful temple buildings and Jesus said, "Do you see these great buildings. Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." Was her giving everything she had left worth it?

Jesus does not comment – just that she gave most.

Yet I always sense he treasures her in her giving. I sense that even though the world would count her gift as loose change – a couple of pennies added in – her gift was bringing joy to God – more joy than for all the checks with a number of zeros behind. For she gave everything she had, her whole living – her whole life.

So what is the next sentence from my mouth – Go and do likewise? No, I think instead of the next woman we will encounter in this gospel according to St. Mark. She will take a flask of very expensive ointment and pour it over Jesus' head. The disciples called it a waste – Jesus said to leave her alone – for she was anointing his body for burial before hand. It was worth it to him.

Two extravagant gifts – two coins – expensive ointment – do they both foreshadow a gift even more precious still?

In a matter of a day that gift would be offered – stripped even of his clothing Jesus would offer his life. Has it been worth it?

Since that Good Friday the world has not changed much. In the shadow of that cross suicide bombers still trust in the power of slaughter to win the day. And Israeli soldiers respond in kind. Was it worth it that Jesus gave all he had – his life?

Babies die. Husbands cheat – politicians deceive – religious leaders still say long prayers and hope the widows and widowers will leave it all to the church. Jesus gave his life and the world's the same.

Was it worth it?

If you believe in Jesus, in his love, his forgiveness, his power in your life, his victory over death it will have been. Worth the thorns and the nails and the thirst and the ridicule – worth even the dying – worth it all if you believe. For in believing you belong to God – not to fear – not to anxiety – not to greed nor hopelessness – In believing you belong to God.

I think of the question with which we began – is it worth it? Sometimes when a Sunday morning is over it seems that it might have been better to have stayed in bed, sometimes tax dollars are wasted, some times soldiers die in a losing cause, sometimes all the careful eating and exercise do not gain even an extra hour of living. But whatever comes when you trust in Jesus you will be all right. In joy, in sorrow, in life, in death, in poverty, in wealth you will be all right now and forever. Faith in Jesus will always be worth it. Amen.