

This morning we need Paul Harvey. We need to know the rest of the story. Some of you know what I'm talking about. Every afternoon Paul Harvey tells a story, a first part like the story of the soffee importers who had a ship full of coffee ruined by salt water. After a commercial break he tells the rest of the story, in this case that that importer who was searching for a way to decaffeinate coffee used that ruined coffee in his experiments, only to find his way to Sanka.

Well, we've got the first half of the story this morning, Jesus told that. There was a woman who was poor, down to her last penny. Two little copper coins, the smallest coins there were. He watched her put an offering into the temple treasury, not one, but both coins, everything. Jesus said, she gave more than all the gifts that were given, more than the hundred dollar, the thousand dollar, the million dollar givers. She ~~the less~~ than a penny given gave most.

How do you think this story ended? God saw her faith so that that very day, as she was leaving the temple a widower about her age bumped into her, fell in love with her, married her, and she never knew a day of want again.

Or how about this. On her way out of the temple, there was a penny on the ground, she picked it up, then another, and another, and like that widow who shared with Elijah her last flour and oil, so this widow never knew a day of want again.

Or this: God saw her love and devotion and that very night he quietly closed ~~his~~ her eyes in the sleep of death and brought her to ~~at~~ well with all his saints.

Or was the rest of the story as tragic as her life up to then had been. She was hungry, homeless, forgotten, just another widow in a world full of widows. No one remembered her, no one helped, she died hungry, helpless, alone.

Only one thing I know about the rest of her story: God did not want us to know it. He chose not to give us the rest of her story. Just as he chose

not to give us the rest of ~~xxxxxxx~~ the story for most all of the people who encountered Jesus. No, he only tells us the rest of Jesus story.

From Jesus, first they stripped away his followers and friends, then <sup>runing away in</sup> ~~x~~ <sup>for</sup> his dignity, spitting upon him, mocking him with a royal crown of ~~thorns~~, slapping him. As they crucified him, they took away ~~in~~ not just a penny, but his very clothing, throwing dice for his cloak. And last, they stripped away his life, leaving him experiencing only God forsakenness and death. That was Jesus offering. All of that is what he has put into the treasury for you.

His gift was more than any gift which can be given for he gave it freely, no conditions, no strings attached. To you he says, here is my life given for you, my death for you. When we gather at the altar, his own body, his precious blood is his offering to you.

Now with Jesus there is a most remarkable rest of the story. Easter, resurrection. <sup>The rest of his story is</sup> The promise for all who believe in him that his offering will mean ~~lifeforxxxxxxxternity~~, forgiveness of all your sins, and life for all eternity with him. The rest of his story is the rest of your story, St. Paul tells us that Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep in death. As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. All because of the life Jesus offered for you.

This is the time of the year when we invite you to consider your stewardship for the coming year. We ask one another to give, keeping in mind the ~~xxxxx~~ widow to whom Jesus pointed. As God sees things the size of our gifts are not measured in dollars, but in what ~~they~~ cost. The widow who gave the least in human ~~x~~ judgement, gave most as God sees it.

Yes, we ask one another to give that together we may praise and worship God and be his hand, feeding the poor. But before you give, I want you to know this: God will not be bargained with. You will not buy good health, continued prosperity, a clear conscience, a place in eternity with your gift, no matter how large it may be, how much you sacrifice to <sup>give</sup> ~~give~~ it. God chose not to tell us the rest of the widow's story. Otherwise we might think God

has the future for sale. But of course, there is not enough money to buy it, *not even the widow's penny is sufficient.*

But what cannot be bought, is given for free. Receive God's gifts in faith, that is your greatest offering to him.

What's the rest of the story? What happens after faith? That's between you and the Holy Spirit. What you give, how you give, there is no rule or law for those who belong to Jesus. There is simply the love which God pours into your heart and through you to others.

One day maybe we will meet that widow, hear from her the rest of the story. But if so, I suspect she will tell us that story we already know, of Jesus and his love.