



Lutheran Church of the Master  
Pastor David Kappus  
Show or Tell?  
November 8, 2009 - Mark 12:38-44

Boy, has this been a week or what?? I don't know about you but this has been one for the books. Our recent conversations, votes, "dark nights of the soul" (and believe me there have been plenty of those to go around), have caused many of us to think longer and harder than ever before about things we may have taken for granted.

How do we understand Biblical authority? What do we mean by "leadership?" What is ministry and how do we do it? As always, Jesus looks us right in the eyes and gives us some answers, if we're willing to look back at him.

I love this story. Who doesn't? Especially in our individualistic, Western U.S. culture, we love the story of the little guy (or gal, as the case may be) coming out on top. And, of course, this story always comes around in the fall, perfectly timed for stewardship season. But our stewardship team has worked hard to prepare an exciting and, dare I say, fun experience for us and they're kicking it off next Sunday. I'm not going to steal the spotlight from them by starting early, even though it's tempting to use this text that way as so many preachers have done so many times.

No, I think it's good to notice something here that we rarely pay attention to and that I have NEVER, in almost 20 years, preached on. You've noticed it, too, but either passed it by as not significant or just not wanted to deal with what it may mean. Here it is: "He (Jesus) watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury." Jesus sat down and deliberately WATCHED people giving their offering.

Maybe it's the times we live in or the situations in which we find ourselves that made that part of our text jump out at me like never before. Jesus is watching me give my offering. Jesus is watching you give your offering. I don't think he cares how much or how little goes in...I think he cares about your commitment to him. He cares about how much you trust in the authority that HE has, as revealed to us in Scripture. He points out the widow because she gave everything she had. She trusted completely in God. She was committed to putting herself, her life, her all into his hands. In his teaching, the people of his time heard authority they had never heard in their Scriptures, in their scribes or in their teachers. We would do well to listen to his stories, teachings and observations and learn from them. He calls us, through the widow, to commit ourselves anew to him.

How often do we truly do that? Let's look at the signs of our commitment. We know that our congregation has been struggling financially but our culture pushes us to put ourselves first so we end up using our money to take a trip, buy a boat or spend thousands on spiffy new appliances for our homes. The widow has watched those before her give large amounts...surely her two cents will make no difference...it hardly makes a sound as she drops it in the collection and yet she is giving everything. We struggle to find enough time for our families, let alone involvement in the church, and this widow seeks out the community of faith even though most others there will not even notice her. Where we have so many that want to demonstrate their leadership by talking a good game, by lording it over others, she demonstrates servant leadership

in the Christian life by her example of obedience rather than any perceived power or influence. Once again, the example that Jesus lifts up is the “least of these” rather than the ones who “put on a good show.”

What did Wall Street do for 30 years? Wall Street put on a “good show” for Main Street. But now it’s intermission. The lights have come up. Suddenly we see that a “show” doesn't care about providing jobs, saving homes, or building small businesses, or taking care of widows and orphans.

Church Street has also been be-dazzled by the shiny attraction of a “Good Show.” How many times have we been more concerned with putting on a good show than telling the Good Story? How many of our beautiful high-tech sanctuaries, “wired” and “wireless” with music for every generation, are more geared to produce soul-jacking performances than soul-jarring, soul-saving participations in God’s mission in the world? How many of our churches measure success more in terms of show-stopper experiences than by soul-starter encounters with the divine? If we get caught up in all this, then we, too, miss the boat and fail the widows and orphans among us. We must set aside our trappings of privilege and power, our flowing robes and important seats and turn the show into tell.

The showy elements of church life are all for nothing if we do not tell the story that brings life...the story of Christ's life, Christ's death, and Christ's resurrection. It is to tell that story again and again, in every age, in every circumstance that transforms the church from a showtime and a show place into a showcase of the living Body of Christ at work in our world. We need a reminder, especially now, that this is what we are to be about in this place, regardless of what else is going on in the church or in our world.

What a perfect reminder we have before us today at the font. Today Avery (and Thomas at the later service) becomes a child of God in the waters of baptism. Could this be a sign of the new life that we need...that comes only after we die to ourselves and are reborn in Christ? Can Avery’s baptism serve as a symbol of a new start together, a diving back into our baptismal calling to tell the Good News in our community, to love our God and serve our neighbor? Can we give everything we have and are to this mission? I hope so because Jesus is watching as we offer what we will to do his will. Let us choose servanthood and make our witness as enduring as the widow’s. Amen.