

Sermon Bytes: We Are the Light

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About 25 years ago I was serving in a two point charge on the border of Kent and Essex counties called Tilbury – Quinn. During that time period there was a lot of old arenas that failed to pass an engineer's inspection and Tilbury's was one of them. The engineers gave them two years to replace the aging structure, which had been designed to last 20 years when it was built 35 years previously.

They went to work with a diligence born of necessity. The community had lots of divisions, one being religion: 60 % Roman Catholic – 25 % United 5 % Baptist 5 % Anglican and 5 % Other. But in order to get things off to a good start, they decided to ask myself on behalf of the United Church and Father Rocheleau on behalf of the Roman Catholic church to start the first meeting off with an invocation prayer.

Prior to my and Father Paul's tenure, the Priest and minister would have got up and done our own thing on behalf of our particular constituencies. However we were occasionally golfing buddies and good friends and decided to do the opening in a dialogue.

I can still remember Father's Paul's opening story. Their church had recently finished a 1 million dollar renovation and ours had just finished a \$75,000 upgrade to the organ and windows. In commenting on that reality, he told how he had begun the fundraising campaign at St Francis: "We need to do 1 million dollars in repairs and upgrades. And I have some good news and I've got some bad news. Which do you want first?" "The good news", someone yelled out. "Well the good news", he said "is that the money is already here. OK – how about the bad news? Well it's still in your pockets"

People smiled but then looked around and saw that this was not just about money or even an arena / recreation complex –or upgrades to the church. This was about what kind of a community we wanted to be and what kind of sacrifices we would be willing to make to reach our goal.

During that campaign we also had sort of a widow's mite story, as one little girl about 9 brought her piggy bank to one of the meetings and offered all she had to the project - \$12.50. Now it took a lot of 12.50's, but everybody pitched in and the 2.5 million was raised and the arena built.

These are both wonderful stories about fundraising and generosity. But our lesson today from Mark's gospel is more of an antithesis than a parallel to these two stories. You see - the story, which is all too often cut from its context, takes place at the end of a series of stories highlighting the legal and lawful approach of the authorities as over and against the gratitude and abundance approach of the Kingdom of love. Just prior to this Jesus has cleared the temple, talking about how the house of God has been turned into a den of thieves as all of the transactions of the temple are designed to extract the maximum out of those who can afford it least. The widow's offering of her mite, while it

is a commendation of her sacrifice, is also a condemnation of those who take advantage of the weak and the powerless for their gain in wealth and prestige

You see the temple donation box was not a simple box. It was a series of giving stations that brought you closer and closer to the halls of power the more you gave, so those who gave lots were noted and appreciated and those who gave only a mite were shoved even further to the periphery. But Jesus sees her gift, and her giving of everything foreshadows his own giving of all. The Kingdom of love and grace is instituted with sacrifice.

Sacrifice changes things. Actually it changes people. Both those who give and those who receive. It is the passing of the salt around the table of life. It is the glimmer of light that breaks into the dark and dreary world.

The Mission and Service fund is just that kind of transformational component. Through Mission and service, we partner with 94 global partners in 24 different countries. We support dozens of first nations churches and outreach in dozens of indigenous communities. We also support dozens of pastoral charges and outreach ministries in rural communities and in the heart of cities across this land.

We also support a hundred or so students for ministry. taking various educational programs Right here in Kingston in the past few years, we have supported a first nation's language initiative in partnership with the Katarokwi centre; a prison chaplaincy program that helps inmates and families with prison life and in the transition into the community; and a church based program to reconnect with the community and to revitalize its mission and its ministry where it serves.

These and all the other programs are made possible by the commitment and sacrifice of people of faith all across this land. Like the widows mite, it is not the amount of the gift that is important. It is the willingness to sacrifice - the joining with others who make similar commitments to make a difference on behalf of the kingdom of love and grace.

Jesus pointed out to the disciples, then and now, and all who would listen, that the Kingdom of Heaven is built by people helping people, by sharing the gifts of their hands and their hearts.

POUR US OUT LIKE UNENDING LOVE

Where are you now, Elijah?
Where are the jars of meal and the jugs of oil
that will not run out of resources?
Where are you now among the widows
desperate with fear and hunger;
where are you now among the children
who must struggle just for survival;
where are you now, Elijah,

among the homeless and the helpless of the world?
Were you there with the disciples, Elijah,
watching gifts go into the treasury,
watching a lonely widow sacrifice
all that she had for living,
watching her place her life and future
in the hands of God?
I see where you are, Jesus:
I see you laying down your life for others,
I see you giving your body to be broken,
I see God in you, holding back nothing –
holding back nothing like
a sacrificing widow,
holding back nothing like a jug of poured oil –
I see God who is willing to give everything
for the sake of the salvation of the world.
I hear your call to us, as God called Elijah,
to go to the sad and despairing;
I see you showing us, as you showed your disciples,
the sacrifices made by the caring;
I hear you calling us to be part of giving
all that we are
for the sake of your future,
all that we have
for your love for the world.
O, pour us out, O God, Holy Giver.
Pour us out, like unending love.

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