

Sermon on Hebrews 9:24-28 and Mark 12:41-44: "Sacrifice, Faith, and Trust Beyond Measure" Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Today's readings from Hebrews 9:24-28 and Mark 12:41-44 bring us to reflect on the themes of sacrifice, selfless giving, faith, hope, and trust. Through these passages, God reveals the true nature of sacrifice—not just as an outward action, but as a deep and faithful surrender of ourselves to His care and purposes.

In Hebrews, we encounter the ultimate act of sacrifice in Jesus' offering of Himself once for all. In the Gospel of Mark, we see an illustration of this selfless giving in the act of the poor widow, who offers all she has in faith. Both of these passages invite us to see that God measures value differently than we do, looking beyond the outward appearance to the heart.

The Greater Sacrifice: Jesus as Our High Priest

In Hebrews 9:24-28, the writer shows us that Jesus is not only our high priest, but that He has entered a heavenly sanctuary—not a physical temple built by human hands, but the very presence of God. Hebrews speaks of Jesus' work with the Greek phrase *hapax*, meaning "once for all." His sacrifice is not repeated again and again, as were the Old Testament sacrifices. Rather, it is complete, perfect, and final. Jesus did not offer the blood of animals; He offered Himself.

The Greek term used here for "sacrifice" is *thusia*, which means an offering that involves cost, suffering, and surrender. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was not only an act of obedience but an act of immense love. The writer of Hebrews uses the word *prosphero*—"to offer up"—in describing Jesus' act, emphasizing that Jesus offered Himself willingly and completely, holding nothing back. He went willingly to the cross, trusting the Father's will and fully committing Himself to the work of salvation.

In this "once-for-all" sacrifice, Jesus dealt with our sins entirely, paying the debt we could not pay. His offering was the ultimate act of faith and trust in the Father, demonstrating a deep love for us and fulfilling God's promise to redeem His people.

The Widow's Offering: An Act of Faith and Trust

In Mark 12:41-44, Jesus observes the people putting money into the temple treasury. He watches as many wealthy people give large sums, but then He sees a poor widow who puts in only two small copper coins. The Greek term here for these coins is *lepta*, the smallest denomination of currency in circulation at that time. To the human eye, her offering might seem insignificant, but Jesus sees it differently. He calls His disciples over and says, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others."

The Greek word here for "put in" is *ballo*, which means "to throw" or "to cast." This implies that the widow did not just gently place her coins in; she gave them with purpose, as an intentional act of surrender to God.

Her *ballo*, her "casting in," reflects a faith that is wholehearted and complete. She gave "all she had to live on," demonstrating a deep trust in God's provision. Her act of giving is a reflection of her deep faith and her reliance on God for her daily needs.

The widow's giving wasn't calculated or restrained; it was an act of surrender. Jesus commends her, not because of the amount she gave, but because her gift shows her total faith and trust in God.

Sacrifice Rooted in Faith, Hope, and Trust

When we look at both Jesus' sacrifice and the widow's offering, we see that true sacrifice is inseparable from faith and trust. Jesus trusted the Father fully, even to the point of laying down His life. The widow also trusted in God's provision, even though her gift left her with nothing in material terms.

The Greek word *pistis*, meaning "faith" or "trust," is key here. Faith is not simply intellectual belief; it is a true heartfelt reliance on God's promises. The widow's faith is evident in her willingness to give all that she had, trusting that God would care for her. This faith is the same kind that we are called to cultivate. It's the faith that enables us to let go of our worldly attachments and surrender ourselves to God's will, even when it costs us.

Faith is the foundation of our relationship with God, and it is through faith that we can offer our lives to Him in sacrificial love. When we trust that God is our provider, our protector, and our redeemer, we can give freely, knowing that He will sustain us.

The Call to Selfless Giving

The widow's gift and Jesus' sacrifice remind us that God's measure of giving is different from ours. The world often values large amounts, grand gestures, and visible success. But God sees the heart, and He values the sacrifices we make out of love and faith, no matter how small they may seem.

Selfless giving, like the widow's, reflects a life surrendered to God. This is the kind of giving that Jesus calls us to—giving that is not calculated or reserved, but that comes from a place of love, faith, and gratitude. When we give with this kind of heart, we participate in God's work of mercy and grace, reflecting His love to the world around us.

In Luther's understanding of vocation, all believers are called to live out their faith in their daily lives. This means that each act of giving, each sacrifice, can be an expression of faith, even if it seems small. Luther taught that it is through our ordinary work, our acts of love, and our selfless giving that we serve God and neighbour.

Lutheran theology teaches us that we are justified by grace through faith. Our good works, our sacrifices, do not earn us salvation—that has already been accomplished by Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. Instead, our acts of giving, our sacrifices, are a response to the overwhelming love and grace we have received. They are a way to live out our faith, to say, "Lord, everything I have is yours. Take and use it for your glory."

The Gift of Hope in Christ

Hebrews speaks strongly to the hope we have in Christ. Jesus has appeared "once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." His sacrifice has secured for us an eternal hope, a promise of life and redemption that cannot be taken away. This hope is not a mere wish or desire but a confident expectation based on God's faithfulness.

The widow's trust in God is rooted in this kind of hope. Though she has little by earthly standards, she has the hope that God sees her, values her, and will provide for her. This hope enables her to give without fear. Likewise, our hope in Christ frees us from anxiety about material wealth or security. When we know that our true treasure is in heaven, we can give generously, trusting that God will meet our needs.

Living Out Sacrifice, Faith, and Trust

What does it mean, then, for us to live in light of these teachings? Sacrificial love does not always mean giving everything we own, but it does mean offering ourselves fully to God. It means being willing to let go of our attachments and placing our trust in God's promises. It means seeing others as God sees them, as beloved children worthy of compassion, kindness, and generosity.

We may not be called to give all our money, but we are called to give our hearts, our time, our love. We are called to forgive as we have been forgiven, to serve as Christ served, to love as we have been loved.

As we look to the cross, we remember that Jesus has already made the ultimate sacrifice for us. His gift of grace frees us to live not in fear or self-preservation but in joyful, open-handed trust. He has gone before us, and He invites us to follow, trusting that He will provide for our every need.

Conclusion: The True Treasure

As we look to the example of Jesus and the widow, we see that true treasure is not found in what we hold onto but in what we surrender. Jesus' sacrifice and the widow's offering teach us that real giving is rooted in faith, in trust, and in hope. And this is the life we are called to—a life that reflects the love of Christ, a life that gives freely, trusting in God's provision.

May we be people who give with faith, who live with hope, and who trust in God's promises. May we, like the widow, be willing to give all that we are and all that we have to the One who has given us everything.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who is our eternal high priest and our perfect sacrifice. Amen.