

*38As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! 40They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."*

*41He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44For 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."*

Thursday morning the office area was noisy with ringing phones and voices and activity – I needed some quiet – some thinking about a sermon time. I wandered over to the lounge.

The lake was blue – the sky as well, most of the trees were bare except one maple. Thursday morning it was glowing in the sunlight – golden yellow leaves falling – drifting in the gentle breeze. For a moment I wondered about the God that knew before the beginning of time how much delight I would find in the colors of autumn leaves. I wondered about that moment of planning before there were electrons and neutrons and protons – before there was a speed for light and before there were photons to bring that light to me. What sort of a God is this that created it all so that a leaf could turn to gold so that I might have delight on a Thursday morning? What is in the heart and mind of this God who has created this incredible world – a world where sand can be melted into glass so clear that I can see out from my place of warmth a lake of blue reflecting a wondrous sky? What is in the soul of this God who gave humans vision to glimpse beauty?

Can the artist be known through brushstrokes on canvas? Can the heart of the composer be revealed from the sounds that come from dancing flute or blasting guitar? Can the spirit of the architect be perceived in brick and mortar and glass? Can God be known in creation?

Maybe some – but mostly God is known in Jesus – the heart and soul and life of God are made known in Jesus.

A widow puts a penny into the offering.

A penny.

In a world that is beginning to measure money in the trillions what is a penny? Not even the smallest candle can be purchased with a penny. Her gift is as insignificant as she is. Most would think her just a brown withered leaf drifting to the ground to be swept away into death – a widow. Days of productive labor are over – whatever children she had have been long-since born. Maybe there is still a glow to her life the way the autumn leaves blaze when productive life is over. But as the world counts value she has little or none – her penny offering has even less.

But Jesus called his disciples and told them how God sees her and her gift: *“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.”*

Was hers a wise gift – giving to support the scribes that wear long robes and pray long prayers for pretense? Is it a good thing that she has given everything she owned so the pastor can sit at a pretty new desk or have a Saturday morning omelet through his expense account? If the world were turned right-side up the money in the treasury would be poured into her empty hands – all the cathedrals and church buildings would be sold and the hungry would be fed and the homeless sheltered. But Jesus said none of that – he simply called attention to her gift – that hers was the greatest of all the gifts given.

God sees, God knows – God delights when we give our whole self in faith. I doubt that this widow was giving to the temple nor to the scribes – in her heart the gift was a gift to God – her whole self given to God.

There is a business side to the church – bricks and mortar, wages and equipment, electricity and gas all need to be paid for. We need a place to gather so that we can study God’s word and sing God’s praises and share with the poor. Some of you give with an eye on these things.

But God’s heart delights when your giving and mine is an expression of our joy in God, our faith in God, our love for God, our hope in God. God’s heart delights when those that the world counts but withered leaves know how precious they are to God – how precious whatever they have to give is to God. Jesus came because of God’s delight

in us – God’s desire to save us and keep us for all eternity. Without him we are but withered leaves swept away into death. But in him you are God’s treasure – God’s joy – God’s delight.

Always there will be those that walk around in long robes and say long prayers and who want to have a revered position in the church and to be first in line at the banquets. But God does not fix God’s heart on them. God’s joy is in the ones that give their gifts in love.

May God grant that in us.