

**Mark 14: 38-44
Creekside COB
November 12, 2006**

“Passionate People”

When I was I kid I imagined what fun it would be if I had the ability to make myself invisible. If I only knew then what I know now. I ran across a simple technique guaranteed to make you disappear. Just listen:

Relax and become conscious of every part of your body. Feel your skin, relax and feel the photons of light hitting your skin, a rain of warmth over your entire body. Now start repeating to yourself, “Light pass through and around me...” and as you chant out loud or in your head, feel the rain of photons passing around and through you until your don’t feel them any more. Bang! You are effectively hidden.

That is all there is to it. As a courtesy to me, however, I would appreciate it if you would hold off disappearing until the service is over.

Let me tell you about an invisible woman who didn’t try to be invisible. You heard her story in the gospel reading. We don’t know her name. She belonged to the class of people on the bottom rung of society’s ladder. She was poor a widow with no identity outside of marriage. What little status she had went to the grave with her husband. She had no legal rights. She was considered non-productive and unvalued. She was insignificant and invisible.

Let’s pretend we could rewind the last few minutes of our worship. Let’s stop where the ushers come forward to receive the offering and replay it. This time, however, I accompany the ushers. As the plates are passed, I watch. I pay observe the

amount given by each person or family. Tell me... how might you react? Would you be uncomfortable? Would you be concerned about me making assumptions about the depth of your commitment based upon what you give? Two things would probably happen. You would have a cow right on the spot, and hold a special council meeting to set terms for my departure.

Jesus sat across from the Temple treasury and watched the worshipers dropping their offerings into the metal coffers. It was easy to spot the rich ones pouring in their large offerings. He noticed what they gave and how they gave it, and they didn't mind being watched. A little extra polish on one's image is good thing.

The invisible widow didn't know it, but Jesus could see her. He watched her approach the coffer to give her offering. She dropped in two copper coins worth about a penny and walked away. There were no theatrics. She didn't call any attention to herself. She quietly and humbly walked to the edge of the cliff and jumped. No one saw her give her pitiful little offering, but Jesus did. Moved by her act, he told the disciples, *"Truly, this poor widow gave more than all those contributing to the treasury. For they gave out of their abundance, but she gave out of her poverty put in everything she had, her whole living."*

This poor widow is down to her last penny. She doesn't know where her next meal is coming from. She has no resources to fall back upon. What a foolish thing she did. We don't know what happened *after* her sacrificial offering. Maybe her act was the start of a rags-to-riches story. We would like to think that God honored her profound faith by giving her the good things of life that her bottom-of-the-barrel status denied her. This is what some TV preachers would have us believe. "You can't be blessed by God until you give to God. You have to plant a seed for God to provide a harvest. Send in your love offering and do good, and God will see to it that you will do well."

The widow's great little gift was no guarantee that her circumstances would improve. But "getting something out of it" wasn't her motivation. She was giving herself whole-heartedly to

God. She had faith that God was totally trustworthy. She had faith that nothing given to God would ever be lost.

Suppose the poor widow belonged to our congregation. What would have been expected of her during the capital campaign? Would we have sent someone to talk to her? “Widow Smith, we want you to know we aren’t expecting anything from you in our campaign. Life is pretty hard for you, so we are exempting you from giving.” How do you suppose she would have responded?

Gordon Cosby was the founding pastor of the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. Early in his ministry he was the minister of a little Baptist church in Virginia. A deacon wanted to discuss a matter concerning a church family. “We have a widow in the church with six children. I’ve discovered that every month she is giving \$4.00, which is a tithe of her income. She can’t continue to do this. We want you to talk with her and let her know that she doesn’t need to feel any obligation to support the church financially. *Tell her she is freed from the responsibility.*”

Cosby visited the woman and shared the concern of the deacons. He spoke as graciously and supportively as he could. He said she was relieved of the responsibility of giving. But as he spoke, tears welled up in her eyes and she said, *“I want to tell you that you are taking away the last thing that gives my life dignity and meaning.”*

“Truly, this poor widow gave more than all the others. For they gave out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had, her whole living.”

We live in a world that constantly pounds the idea into our heads that *we don’t have enough*. “You don’t have enough TIME. You don’t have enough MONEY. You don’t have enough for your KID’S EDUCATION. You don’t have enough SPEED in your computer. You don’t have enough FIBER in your diet. Your HOUSE isn’t big enough. Your LOOKS aren’t good enough. You don’t have enough for RETIREMENT.” Whatever the commodity, we’re told that our supplies are scarce.

Then along comes Jesus telling us that God will supply everything we need. He captures our imaginations with the message that life does not consist in the abundance of things but in the trust that God will provide. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, don’t be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or drink or wear.” I like the way The Message goes on to say:

People who don’t know God and how he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep you life in God- reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

Last Monday was Helen Stout’s funeral. While talking with the family about the things they appreciated most about Helen, her daughter shared something Helen often said. “I don’t have much, but its more than enough.” Helen knew, and the woman visited by Gordon Cosby knew that our dignity comes from the need to give and not the greed to get.

I’m troubled by the story of the widow’s offering. It makes me squirm because if I was destitute with just a few dollars in my pocket, I doubt that I would put it all in the plate. I’m pretty sure you wouldn’t, either... not if we approach our relationship with Jesus with cool, detached, measured logic.

The thrust of the story isn’t about *what* was given but on the *nature* of the act. When people respond to Jesus in passionate, whole-hearted ways, we try to bring reason into the picture. “Enthusiasm has its place, but let’s not go overboard. Before you get carried away, step back and think things through.”

We all know that Ted Noffsinger got “so excited” during the time leading up to our arrival in this place. I’m glad Ted gets excited. It gives us the drive to do what needs to be done. But we need more than excitement—we need passion.

A century ago, a Scottish theologian said, You show me someone who hasn’t in a moment of being taken over by his

love for someone dear to him; you show me someone who hasn't purchased a gift he couldn't afford for someone dear to him, and I'll show you someone not fit for the kingdom."

The quality of our personal relationship with Jesus and the quality of the church's spirit is tied to our capacity for passion and our willingness to be enthralled by the lover of our souls. Tending to the practical matters of church life is a must. Careful planning and prudence is essential to the effective working of the church. But prudence is no substitute for passion. Church can be bland and uninteresting and uninviting if the emphasis is upon acceptable goals and attainable budgets.

A few Sundays ago I quoted from C. S. Lewis' Screwtape Letters. The devil, Screwtape advises his apprentice on how to negate the influence of Christians. He says, "Talk to him about moderation in all things. If you can get him to the point of thinking that religion is all very well up to a point, you can feel happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all—and far more amusing."

Have you been taken over by the love of Someone who is dear to you? Has it ever led you to do something risky, illogical, and unreasonable like giving away everything you've got? If you haven't, isn't it about time?

Dr. Robert McClure was a brilliant missionary surgeon noted for his "abrasive" personality. He was speaking to students at the University of Toronto about the work he had done in the Gaza Strip. McClure called them a bunch of North American "fat cats" who knew nothing about the world, nothing about life, and nothing about gratitude. He then proceeded to tell a story.

In Gaza he had stopped at a peasant's home to do a post-surgical call for a woman on whom he had operated. He said he had done a, "rear axel job." The woman and her husband were dirt-poor and had a herd of livestock consisting of an angora rabbit and two chickens. She combed the hair from the rabbit, wove it and sold it. She and her husband ate or sold the eggs from the chickens.

After the surgeon examined the woman, she insisted that he stay for lunch. He had another call to make a mile away, but said that after he was done he would join them. He returned an hour later, and curious to see what was for lunch he lifted the lid of the cooking pot. She was cooking a rabbit and two chickens. Out of gratitude to McClure she had given their only source of income and their food supply. She held nothing back.

As the sometimes-abrasive doctor told this story to the students, he was sobbing and blubbering out, *“You people know nothing of gratitude, nothing.”*

“Truly, this poor widow gave more than all those contributing to the treasury. For they gave out of their abundance, but she gave out of her poverty put in everything she had, her whole living.”