We're at week three of our series on money.
Last week Geraldine spoke to us from the parable of the dishonest manager.
In a nutshell, the message was,
"Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone,
you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."
Who is going to be welcoming you?
Well the parable of the dishonest manager was a tricky one.
By contrast, today's passage is simple to understand.
I think most of the children in younger years of primary school could tell us the main message.
Here's the main message.
God values sacrifice.
God values sacrifice.
So given that I've already told you what the passage is about, and that you can see that for yourself by reading the passage, why do I need to preach a sermon?
The answer is because preaching is not only addressed to our minds. If the passage is tricky, it might need to be more addressed to our minds. But preaching is addressed to our hearts.
It's not my job just to explain to you what the passage means, I need to help you to want to put it into practice.
God values sacrifice.
It's tremendously easy to understand.
But very difficult to put into practice.
It's a bit like 'love your enemies'.
A grade 2 can tell you what that means.
But who can put it into practice - really put it into practice?

So let's turn to God's word
with the expectation not so much that we will learn something, though who knows, we might, but that God will change our hearts.

The first words of our passage are, 'As Jesus looked up,' And that gives you a clue that this little story is connected to something else. What did Jesus look up from? The answer is, Jesus looked up from teaching his disciples. What was he teaching them? Here are the last two verses of the previous chapter. "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect at the market places and to have the most important seats at the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. They devour widows houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely." They devour widows houses. Gosh that's strong language. It sounds like they eat widows houses for breakfast. With gusto. They are hungry and they scoff them down. Like pet dogs that haven't been fed for two days. They devour widows houses. And who is the main character is our story today? We don't know her name. We don't know her occupation. We don't know what she looks like. What do we know about her? Only one thing. She is a poor widow. So we enter this story feeling outraged already.
Or we ought to.
Widows are having their houses devoured by rapacious teachers of the law.
Doesn't that make you mad?
Here's a story from the news this week.
A medical specialist tried to charge an old bloke $18K out of pocket expenses for a prostate operation,
The medical association said the out of pocket expenses should have been more like $180.
The guy went and got the operation for free in a public hospital.
Doesn't it make you mad when greedy people rip off vulnerable little people?
And isn't it that much worse, when the greedy people in question are representing God?
Are you feeling outraged yet?
Good.
Now you are in the right headspace to read our story.
"As Jesus looked up,
he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins."
This poor widow has some hungry teachers of the law who want to eat her house.
But she puts two copper coins into the temple treasury anyway.
What do you think that money was used for?
Well maybe in some measure paying for the temple worship she was participating in.
But maybe, it was also paying for the hungry teachers of the law who wanted to eat her house.
Do you think that thought even crossed her mind?
No of course not.
She was expressing her love to God.
She wasn't concerned about what the money was spent on, she was concerned to honour the God who made her and loved her.
That's what is in her heart.
And Jesus honours her gift.
He doesn't rush up to her and say,
"Hey look, you know that gift is not going to be well used
by the temple authorities.
Maybe you should give somewhere else."
No, Jesus honours the love in her heart.
He's not distracted at all by the corruption of the world.
Why not?
Because the most important thing is
that this woman has a chance to express her devotion to God.
That's what giving is about.

So here's the first principal about giving from this passage.
God doesn't need your money.
Did you know that?
Whatever he wants to do,
God can do it without your money.
We might be tempted to sometimes talk
like God's kingdom depends on us.
We might say,
"Church members, if we don't give,
the God's work won't be able to proceed."
But that's not true.
God runs the show.
If he wants to make it happen,
he can.
And if he wants to,
he can do it without us.
If we don't give,
God will still achieve his purposes,
he will just do it without us.
He will work through the church down the road instead.

The point of giving is not that God wants your money,
it's that God wants your heart.
God wants to capture your heart in love and devotion to him.
This poor widow's heart was captured in love and devotion to God.
Our money can be a problem.
It can form a barrier between our hearts and God. And there's only one way to break down that barrier. Cut the chains that bind our hearts to our money. Giving cuts those chains.

So that's the first principal about giving. God doesn't need your money, God wants your heart. The point of giving is not so God can get things done, and if we didn't give, his hands would be tied behind his back. The point of giving is to express our love for God and deepen our relationship with him.

Here's the second principle of giving. This is the main point of the story. Most primary school students could recognise it. God values sacrifice. Listen to what Jesus said, "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." What was the value of the widow's gift? In today's terms, it was like she'd thrown in a couple of dollar coins. The rich had poured in thousands of dollars, tens of thousands of dollars. But Jesus says that she gave more. How could that be? Because they gave out of their wealth, out of their excess. She gave out of her poverty. She gave all she had to live on. She gave to God instead of eating dinner that night. Who made the greater sacrifice? The widow did.
So in God's eyes, she gave the most.

Now that turns the world's thinking on its head. Have you ever seen a fundraising drive for a project. We have the following sponsors for our project. The following silver sponsors who have given $1000 each .... The following gold sponsors who have given $5000 each .... and two platinum sponsors who each have given $10000 .... And everyone claps the incredibly generous platinum sponsors. But what if they did it this way? We have the following silver sponsors who each gave up 1% of their annual income. And the following gold sponsors who gave up 5% of their annual income. And a platinum sponsor who gave up 10% of her annual income. And that platinum sponsor was a poor widow. And everyone claps the poor widow. Can you image that happening? Of course not. Why not? You couldn't run a fundraising event that way. The rich would not play. If they give more than everyone else, they want to be honoured more than everyone else. They wouldn't sit back and clap the poor widow when they gave ten times as much money as her and they are not getting the applause. But Jesus says, that is what is happening in heaven. God claps the sacrifice. God doesn't care about how much it is. He cares about how much it hurt you to do it. What is the sacrifice? What have you given up? Because that is a measure of your love for him. He can get the money from anywhere.
But he values the sacrifice.

I want to share another Bible story with you about sacrifice. You can find the story in 2 Samuel 24. The prophet Gad went to David and told him to sacrifice to God on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. And when he got there, Araunah said to him, you can have anything you like from my herds and my flocks. Take whatever you want and sacrifice to the Lord. How did David answer him?
"I insist on paying you.
I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing."

David was a man after God's heart. And he knew God's heart. And he would not offer to God what had not cost him anything, because that would have revealed a heart that was not sold out for God. Sacrifice matters to God.

Sometimes people have said to me, "Wouldn't it be great if we could rebuild the Op Shop just using insurance money? Wouldn't it be great if we could get the bishop to find us a few hundred thousand dollars so we could avoid going into debt?"
Well No, actually. It wouldn't be so great. How can we expect God to bless us in his service if we use what cost us nothing? We can't be silly or unrealistic about that. But I don't think that's actually our temptation. Our temptation is to try to avoid sacrifice. But sacrifice matters to God.

The next thing I want you to notice about the widow's gift is this.
She gave two small copper coins. 
And it's important that she gave two, 
because that means she could have given one.
If she had given one, 
that would still have been a generous and sacrificial gift.
She would have given half of what she had to live on.
Who would dare to say that's not generous?
But she chose to give both of them.
Now many people if they were advising her 
would say to her,
"God knows that you need something to live on.
God doesn't require you to give all you have for food for today."
And those things are true.
But you see, she didn't give because God required her to.
She gave because she wanted to, 
her love for God overflowed into generosity.
No one was pressuring her to give.
She decided to do it freely, of her own accord.
It was sacrificial generosity. 
And it was sacrificial generosity freely undertaken.

There's an important principle of Christian giving there.
God does want us to be sacrificially generous.
But God doesn't want anyone to be coerced into giving to him.
Giving is mostly about what is going on in our hearts.
It's far more about our hearts than what the gift itself can achieve.
So if a person is giving because they are feeling pressured, 
then the gift is not doing the work in their heart that it is meant to.
Giving does its spiritual work in our hearts 
when it is done entirely freely.

You are going to be given opportunities in the future 
to give to projects at Holy Trinity.
We're going to have a project 
to upgrade the sound equipment over in the corner, 
particularly to get rid of the cords on the microphones,
because they are a trip hazard.
At some point in the not too distant future,
we will put it before you,
and some people might like to give a special gift
to help us do that project.
But I don't want anyone to feel under pressure or under compulsion.
Because if you were to give like that,
God wouldn't be able to use your gift to transform your heart.
Then a bit further down the track,
you will be given a chance to give towards our building project.
That's a more substantial project.
But the same thing goes.
God only wants giving that is freely entered into.

The next thing I want you to notice
is how powerfully God has used the widow's gift.
When she walked up
to put her two copper coins into the temple treasury,
she may well have thought to herself,
"What good does my little gift do?
What difference do I make?"
But think about it.
Think about the incredible difference her gift has made
to the kingdom of God.
She didn't know that Jesus was watching,
but he was.
And Jesus pointed her out as an example of giving.
And everyone who has read Luke's gospel knows her story.
Everyone has heard of the widow's mite.
Mite was the old name for the copper coins she put in.
Everyone knows her story.
And by telling her story,
how many people have been motivated
to be more generous to the work of God's kingdom?
That widow has been the catalyst to more Christian giving
than probably anyone else except Jesus.
So we should never discount what God can do with a small gift, if it is given with the right heart.

Well I'm not sure if you find the story of the sacrificial generosity of this widow moving, I certainly do. My attempts at sacrificial generosity look quite feeble when they are put next to hers. I find it hard to preach this passage because her story is so moving that I'm scared that people will feel like I'm trying to manipulate them. "Why does he want to tell us this story anyway? What does he want from us?"
The reason I'm telling you the story is because Jesus pointed it out and Luke wrote it down. Jesus wanted the story told. But you know what? The widows' story is not the most powerful story of sacrificial generosity. The man who drew attention to her story is actually far more generous himself. Where she gave up all she had to live on, Jesus gave up life itself. Less than a week after calling people's attention to the widow's generosity, Jesus would be hanging on a cross, paying for the sins of the world. And Jesus knew that was what was going to happen. Jesus would be cut off, forsaken by God the Father, as he absorbed the punishment for your sins and mine. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Now that is generosity. Jesus' generosity is immeasurably more than ours. His generosity to us is what motivates all our generosity to others.
Sacrifice matters to God. Jesus' sacrifice mattered so much to the Father that it was enough to pay the price so the guilty could go free.

Let's praise God for Jesus' sacrifice. Let's thank God for everything the widow teaches us about sacrifice and about giving that pleases God.