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ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
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PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: We're concluding our series
2 today on the Heart Of The Matter, and I wouldn't want to
3 do this every year in Lent, I'll be real honest with
4 you, but I think it's really awesome, because it is
5 about the journey of going to the cross.

6 Today we have these jars that are by the crosses
7 and when the time comes we'll hand out and distribute
8 those cards, if you haven't had a chance to do that, and
9 you can come to the cross and do that.

10 I want to jump into that story of the widow,
11 about does it hurt? What is sacrificial giving?

12 And I don't have illusions of grandeur that
13 anything I'm going to say today is going to put three
14 more zeros behind whatever your decision is as a family.

15 That's just not something I can do. I know my
16 limitation. I also know the joy of challenge.

17 Go back to your Bibles, if you would, please.
18 There are two launching pads that we had in the midst of
19 this whole journey together, and one of those was that
20 verse from Psalm 86.

21 "Where your treasure is, there your heart will
22 be."

23 Jesus said that one. He does talk about finances
24 and giving four times more than he does love.

25 That's kind of an interesting fact of the

1 scriptures.

2 Where your treasure is, your heart will be there.

3 This is a matter of the heart.

4 Psalm 86, "Give me an undivided heart. I give

5 thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart."

6 And that's just the whole person. That's the

7 whole lifestyle thing.

8 It's the multiplication kind of thing that goes

9 on, so I hope to shine a little bit of light today on

10 the story of this widow.

11 But in order to do that I think you need to

12 understand the context a little bit, and I hate assuming

13 prior knowledge.

14 So if you will come with me, and we are not going

15 to read the whole Gospel of Mark, but we need to look at

16 the whole Gospel of Mark.

17 So it begins in Mark 1, it's on page 32 of my

18 Bible, and there are a couple things I want to point out

19 to you about Mark's Gospel.

20 This woman that is clear down towards the end in

21 the 12th chapter never says a word.

22 But she's such a good teacher, and we need to

23 come full circle, as it were, to see why she's so

24 powerful and why Jesus at this point in his ministry is

25 going, guys, check her out.

1 She gets it. She gets it. So we'll look at it a
2 little bit.

3 For those of us that aren't huge Biblical
4 scholars, Mark is the shortest of the gospels. It's
5 sixteen chapters long.

6 We've got four gospel writers. Matthew, Mark,
7 Luke and John.

8 It's sixteen chapters long. It's the shortest
9 one of the gospels.

10 And, interestingly, six of those sixteen
11 chapters, that's over a third of Mark's Gospel, takes
12 place from Palm Sunday to Easter.

13 And that's the celebration we are getting ready
14 to embark upon next weekend, Palm Sunday.

15 So that is significant, that over a third of the
16 story has to do with what Jesus was doing towards the
17 very end of his life. That's just a mathematical
18 reality in there.

19 Also Mark 1, the story does not have anything
20 about Jesus when he's young.

21 He's a full raised adult and the story begins at
22 baptism.

23 John the Baptist appears in the wilderness and
24 he's doing his thing, and Jesus gets baptized, and
25 that's the beginning of the story.

1 And, sadly, so often that's the end of the story
2 for a lot of Christian people, the baptism.

3 That's kind of not only a right of passage, but
4 some people interpret that as kind of a key to heaven,
5 and so they have got the key, or the ticket to heaven,
6 and they put it in the drawer for however many years and
7 then they get it out.

8 I wish I had a dollar for every time a funeral
9 home will call and they'll say, "We've got a funeral for
10 you to do."

11 And I'll say, "Do we know this person?"

12 "Well, I don't think so, but they requested a
13 Lutheran minister and they were baptized Lutheran."

14 Some people have that understanding, and maybe
15 that person, male or female, maybe showed up once in a
16 while after their baptism for another baptism, but
17 really for so many people it's the beginning of the
18 journey and also the end.

19 That's sad, and I think that's why churches
20 suffer so much.

21 There is a misunderstanding of that grace that we
22 just live and breathe in and we have to stay hydrated.

23 And it's not just once for the kids or grandkids
24 and friends or the neighbors; it's constant.

25 It's the beginning of Mark's story and it

1 certainly isn't the ending.

2 So that's what is going on. Jesus arrives, in
3 Mark 1, Verse 15, it's right after his Lent, he has been
4 out for forty days in the wilderness, that's why we do
5 forty days.

6 Look at Verse 15, he's out there, and he says,
7 "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come
8 near, repent and believe the good news."

9 That's Jesus's first sermon. He says right now
10 is the time, and some get it and some don't, and the
11 same was true then and the same is true now.

12 Some people just don't understand. What do you
13 mean?

14 It means right here, right now, the kingdom is at
15 hand.

16 I'm with you, I'm with you, and I'm trying to
17 teach you. That's his first sermon.

18 He gathers a group of followers immediately,
19 small group, and the rest is history.

20 Not only is it history, but it's your story, my
21 story, and our story together as his gang, his posse,
22 his disciples.

23 And so he's doing that, and they're healing,
24 casting out demons, preaching, teaching, all the while
25 he's causing this tremendous conflict with churched

1 people.

2 And those people are the religious leaders of the
3 society when Jesus was doing his ministry.

4 And so there's a tension beneath the surface of
5 Mark's Gospel, that Jesus is doing these wonderful
6 things with this group of followers, and a lot of people
7 are offended by it.

8 And we see that already in the third chapter,
9 he's just getting right into, we see it in Mark 3:6, the
10 Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the
11 Herodians against him, how to destroy him. Those are
12 the church people.

13 Jesus had a lot of enemies, because what he was
14 doing was so fresh and creative and so forward thinking.

15 The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots, to
16 name a few groups, the Herodians, they are all against
17 Jesus, and he's just doing good stuff.

18 It's within that background of Jesus and his crew
19 of twelve guys doing their thing that in that crew of
20 twelve he selects three to go to very special places.
21 Peter and James and John.

22 Somehow Jesus saw something in those guys that he
23 was just kind of like, you guys, you are the three of
24 the twelve, the 25 percent kind of thing, and I really
25 want you guys to go to some special places, and he does

1 that with them. The first time it happens is in the 5th
2 Chapter.

3 I just had a powerful experience of a funeral
4 here Tuesday night, a blessed woman from our community.

5 Dawn was forty-three years old, and she just was
6 this wonderful example and teacher for us.

7 And I used this text of this woman who had been
8 ailing for some years and then there is the story in
9 Mark 5, Verse 35, there's this girl who has died and
10 Jesus raises her back to new life.

11 But what he does in the midst of that is he
12 brings along the mom and the dad, it's a family story,
13 and also Peter, James and John.

14 We see that in Chapter 5, Verse 37. He allows no
15 one to follow him except Peter, James and John, the
16 brother of James.

17 When they came to the house of the leader, they
18 go in there and they raise this girl back to life, which
19 is interesting, Jesus chooses three of the twelve to go
20 special places.

21 We see it again a couple chapters later. He's
22 still doing all the preaching and teaching and conflicts
23 with the leaders, and he takes them on a mountain top
24 journey in the 9th Chapter.

25 Again it's those three, Peter, James and John,

1 interestingly.

2 Chapter 9, Verse 2, six days later, this is six
3 days after Peter had come to the conclusion that Jesus
4 was the Messiah, he says you are the Lord, you are all
5 that.

6 And Jesus says, yes, okay, don't tell anybody
7 about it yet, but you've got it.

8 And now he invites Peter and James and John,
9 Chapter 9:2, to go on top of a mountain.

10 He led them up a high mountain apart by
11 themselves and he was transfigured before them.

12 He goes up and his clothes are just dazzling
13 white, and it's this mountain top experience for those
14 three disciples.

15 We made the point at Dawn's funeral, and I made
16 the point Wednesday night as I was preaching for our
17 Lenten service, I made the point about how when you are
18 on the mountain top the air gets kind of thin

19 And sometimes when you are one of those disciples
20 that has been called to certain things, you might kind
21 of get to questioning a little bit and wondering, and
22 those are the inklings of even a deeper faith.

23 But we see it right away with Peter in the 10th
24 chapter, Verse 28.

25 He has been to the mountain top. He has been on

1 the holy ground of raising somebody to new life, which
2 is a powerful experience, and some of you guys that have
3 been to AA meetings, you know what that looks like.

4 Some of you have been in other situations, you
5 know what it's like when somebody gets another chance at
6 life, literally.

7 But, see, Peter, he has been on the mountain top
8 experience, but even Peter is starting to question a
9 little bit.

10 Chapter 10, Verse 28, he says, "Lord, we've left
11 everything and followed you."

12 He's like, you know, there is not a whole lot of
13 others that would have done what we've done, and he's
14 saying really what I've done.

15 He wants to know if his investment is going to
16 pay for itself.

17 And Jesus reassures him, which is always what he
18 does, he says, "Truly I tell you," Verse 29, "there is
19 no one who has left their house, their brother, their
20 sister or mother or father or children or fields for my
21 sake and for the sake of the good news who will not
22 receive a hundred fold."

23 You heard one of the kids say in the video, they
24 said it feels so good to give, because I get back ten
25 times more than I put in.

1 Jesus said not only ten, but a hundred times.
2 It's going to be worth it. Your investment is going to
3 be worth it.

4 He's not talking financially as much as with your
5 heart. You will get it back.

6 So Peter is in that boat, and then here's James
7 and John saying virtually the same thing down in Verse
8 35.

9 "James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came
10 forward to him and they said, "Teacher, we want you to
11 do for us whatever we ask."

12 And he said, "What is it you want me to do for
13 you?"

14 They said, "We want to sit at your right and your
15 left hand when your kingdom comes."

16 We want good seats, because we have paid the
17 price.

18 Jesus said, are you sure you guys are ready for
19 that?

20 Yes, we're, we're up.

21 He said I don't know if you are able or not, to
22 be baptized with the baptism I am, and drink from the
23 cup that I am going to drink

24 And he kind of leaves it at that point and the
25 ten who heard this, Verse 41, they were angry with James

1 and John, they are like who do these guys think they
2 are?

3 But the story continues, it's winding down, and
4 here is where Palm Sunday begins in Chapter 11.

5 The same Peter who was named the rock was feeling
6 kind of heavy, and James and John, they wanted these
7 really good seats, they are kind of misunderstanding

8 And in the 11th Chapter, the first verse comes
9 in, this is the text for next Sunday morning, this is
10 one of my favorite little twinklings in the story.

11 "When they were approaching Jerusalem, at
12 Bethpage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus
13 sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the
14 village ahead of you and immediately as you enter you
15 will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden
16 on."

17 I think God has such a great sense of humor, and
18 Jesus does, too.

19 My suspicion is when James and John say we would
20 really like good seats, Jesus kind of leaves that, and
21 then in the next chapter I'll bet those are the two he
22 sent to go get the donkey.

23 Because if you are like me, every once in a while
24 you are kind of like I don't know if my investment is
25 going to pay off, but I also want a little preferential

1 seating

2 And sometimes Jesus reminds me that I'm just a
3 donkey fetcher, and those of you have been around
4 livestock know what that feels like.

5 Jesus sent two of the disciples, I'll bet it was
6 James and John, and that's not a mountain top
7 experience.

8 Go get me a donkey.

9 What? I wanted a good seat.

10 That's right. Be a donkey fetcher.

11 So he leaves that, and then the story comes in,
12 he cleanses the temple, and these disputes over
13 teachings are coming, he does a parable in there, he
14 does some awesome teaching

15 And then we're in the 12th Chapter. That's where
16 we are going to find the widow.

17 But before we get to the widow we have to kind of
18 understand the launching pad right before the widow's
19 story.

20 It's from Chapter 12, Verses 28 and following.
21 Remember, he has this resistance from religious people,
22 but something has changed, because the text says, "One
23 of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with
24 one another, and seeing that he answered them well he
25 asked him, "Which commandment is first of all?"

1 And Jesus answered, "The first one is hear, oh
2 Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall
3 love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all
4 your soul and with all your mind and with all your
5 strength. The second one is this. You should love your
6 neighbor as yourself. There is nothing greater than
7 this."

8 Then the scribe said to him, this is a religious
9 person, he said, "You're right, teacher," which is the
10 definition of who the Lord is, we're disciples, we're
11 learners, he's the teacher.

12 "You have truly said that he is one and besides
13 him there is no other, and to love him with all the
14 heart, with all the understanding, with all the
15 strength, and to love one's neighbors as oneself, this
16 is much more important than all whole burnt offerings
17 and sacrifices."

18 "When Jesus saw that he answered wisely he said
19 to him, "You're not far from the kingdom of God."

20 Remember what his first sermon was? The kingdom
21 of God is here, it's at hand.

22 And now he's finally saying to a religious
23 person, you're not far, you're close, you're getting it.

24 Your heart is being penetrated, it is about the
25 heart, and it's not a new concept.

1 That was an Old Testament concept, too. That's
2 why the scribe already knew it.

3 To love the Lord your God with your all heart,
4 with all your understanding, with all your strength, to
5 love one's neighbor as yourself.

6 The scribe gets it. He said, "This is more
7 important than all whole burnt offerings and
8 sacrifices."

9 It's not a matter of money. Jesus just cleansed
10 the temple because of the corrupt system they started to
11 play about how they weren't really the church; they were
12 just taking in money.

13 So he said to that guy, he said you're close.
14 Isn't that cool?

15 Then what Jesus does is he cautions people about
16 appearances.

17 He cautions the disciples about people who talk
18 the talk, but don't walk the walk, and he gets very
19 specific in Verse 38.

20 He says, "Beware of the scribes and those who
21 like to walk around in their long robes and be greeted
22 with respect in the marketplace, and to have the best
23 seats," remember that was that seat thing about James
24 and John, we want a good seat, one on your right and one
25 on your left hand, and he goes go get me a donkey.

1 He says beware of those people who want to sit in
2 the front row and draw attention to themselves.

3 They have these really flowery prayers, they have
4 these long prayers, they sit in the seat of honor, they
5 devour widows' houses for the sake of appearances, they
6 say these long prayers, they will receive the greater
7 condemnation, Verse 40.

8 That's the context, see? Beware of people who
9 talk the talk and don't walk the walk.

10 That's where the widow shows up. Along comes
11 this poor widow.

12 She's right at the right place at the right time
13 and she teaches the right thing.

14 They have been talking about the kingdom being
15 near.

16 They have been talking about walking the walk.
17 They have been talking about humility, simplicity,
18 lifestyle.

19 And here come this woman. Not only is she a
20 widow, the text says, but she's a poor widow.

21 That's a little bit of an oxymoron, but not
22 really, because there was no social welfare system in
23 existence at this time in history.

24 That's why so often in the Old Testament you'll
25 see to take care of the widows, the orphans, and the

1 homeless, because there is no social security.

2 But when she's identified by the text as a poor
3 widow, it probably means that she doesn't even have a
4 family that's going to take care of her, because that's
5 really all you had.

6 Because, again, the temple had to be cleansed
7 because they weren't doing a good job of being the
8 church.

9 So this woman shows up, and a bunch of people are
10 coming in, and they are putting in big sums, but the
11 point being this poor widow was not a beneficiary of the
12 system; in fact, she was a victim of it, and yet she
13 came.

14 She was still in the right place at the right
15 time.

16 In other words, her putting a contribution into
17 the church coffers was not going to guarantee her
18 anything. Not a funeral. Nothing. The system wasn't
19 working.

20 And so it's interesting, she is a poor widow, but
21 she's not a bitter widow.

22 She's not a self-entitlement widow, and there is
23 a tremendous difference.

24 She's a poor widow. She doesn't have a whole lot
25 of choice, and she doesn't have a whole lot of

1 abundance.

2 She gives from her heart instead of her checking
3 account, her retirement fund, or her savings account.
4 She doesn't have any of that.

5 That's why Jesus says she gets it. That's why
6 he's pointing her out, and that's why she's so
7 important.

8 She was not a beneficiary; she was a participant
9 and a contributor.

10 She reminds me of my mom. My mom has been
11 widowed two times over.

12 And my mom is not a taker; she is a giver. My
13 dad died 17 years ago, actually this time of year,
14 during the season of Lent, and my dad had been sick for
15 probably twenty years.

16 He died when he was 53. He had a kidney
17 transplant, quintuple bypass, and he had cancer all over
18 his body.

19 His jaw had to be removed, and so the way he
20 would eat his food is he had to mash it up, and he had
21 to eat soft food and it was really hard to be around.
22 His jaw bone was removed toward the end.

23 And my mom was a career school teacher, who quit
24 her job so that she could be at home with my dad, but
25 for years it was really tough. But never did my mom get

1 bitter.

2 And then, a lot of you know, about five or six
3 years ago she fell in a love with a guy that was my
4 family doctor as a kid, Chuck.

5 His wife Marilyn died a brutal death of cancer as
6 well.

7 And my mom and Chuck fell in love and got
8 married, thinking they were going to have several good
9 years together.

10 She knew at the time that Chuck had Parkinson's
11 and, of course, we were just kids, we were kind of
12 concerned, do you want to do this again?

13 She wanted to do it again. She married Chuck,
14 with Parkinson's, and then Alzheimer's kicked in on
15 Chuck, that's brutal, he had the whole broken hip thing,
16 as some of you know

17 And now what is my mom doing? She is not even
18 bitter about that.

19 Now she is investing in her surrogate grandkid
20 Jeff, who is down in Houston, and he just had his pelvis
21 removed from cancer. But she's not bitter.

22 That's who I imagine when I see this poor widow,
23 but she's not a poor me widow.

24 She just doesn't have pockets that have a reserve
25 of wealth, but she has this amazing heart that is

1 exceeding them all, you see.

2 She's not a beneficiary; she's a participant and
3 a contributor. She's not a taker; she's a giver.

4 They are contributing out of their abundance;
5 she's contributing out of her poverty.

6 The guy across the column, Jesus said you're
7 close to the kingdom of God.

8 It's as if he's saying she's in it. See. She
9 put in everything she had. All she had to live on.

10 In other words, it wasn't even an amount of
11 coins.

12 It was about I trust my life to the church, even
13 though the church has made some mistakes, even though
14 the church temple had corrupted widows, that's who she
15 was, she still somehow did that.

16 Isn't that amazing? I love that. It was a gift
17 from her heart and not her bank account or retirement
18 fund, because she didn't have either one of those.

19 She's intriguing. She's silent. She's held up
20 and held out as an example.

21 God doesn't want our money; he wants our hearts.
22 That is the heart of the matter.

23 So it's interesting, because it doesn't hurt; it
24 helps. Isn't that a cool paradox?

25 For where your treasure is, there your heart will

1 be also.

2 And this is a woman who should have had a broken
3 heart. She's widowed, probably doesn't have a family
4 that's supporting her, she doesn't have a church that
5 values her.

6 And yet she continues to come there. She is in
7 the right place at the right time, even though the place
8 needed to be lemon-juiced and cleansed.

9 She is just so amazing. She is the
10 quintessential character then that Jesus is teaching
11 about.

12 And it's interesting, because now what is going
13 to start happening is all hell is going to break loose
14 and Jesus is going to have to die for the sake of the
15 church.

16 The temple is going to be destroyed, but the body
17 of Christ will raise.

18 So that is what Mark is trying to get through to
19 us, I think, in his sequencing of all of that stuff;
20 that it is a matter of the heart, and God's heart beats
21 for us, bleeds for us, and is open to us. He gave us
22 his son to make the church different.

23 We were at the symphony last night. It was my
24 first time at the Holland Performing Arts Center,
25 beautiful facility.

1 And the conductor of the National Symphony of
2 Washington, D.C., he just said, wow, what a beautiful
3 place. You people in Omaha are so fortunate.

4 And he's right. It's beautiful. The concert
5 arena is just fabulous

6 And I feel like that guy today. Wow. What a
7 beautiful place.

8 The people of Bethany are so fortunate. We are.
9 That's the heart of the matter. It's a gratitude thing.

10 Let's pray.

11 Jesus, I want to thank you for that widow. She
12 gets it and she gives.

13 She's an example of giving a gift that she will
14 feel, because she doesn't have anything to trust except
15 you and your benevolence

16 So I thank you in advance for everybody who is
17 tolerating, and participating, and praying as we have
18 been talking about the heart Of the matter.

19 Lord, thank you for your grace, for the rain
20 today that washes, renews and cleanses, and would you
21 please be pleased with our feeble efforts. For we pray
22 it in your Son's name.

23 Amen.

24

25