

Omnipresence, omnipresence, omnipotence... Some of you may be more familiar with those words than others. Those big “omni” words are three of the attributes or characteristics of God found in his Bible. They are terms that sound pretty intellectual and theological, but they are really just fancy words for some very down to earth truths.

God’s omnipresence (that he is present everywhere) means that he is with us wherever we go – even if you were shipped off to the middle of Afghanistan, God is there.

God’s omniscience (that he knows everything) means that he knows what we are going through – even when the doctor’s don’t have answers and our friends stumble for words because they’ve never experienced what we are going through, God knows.

God’s omnipotence (that he is all-powerful) means that nothing that happens in your life is outside the guiding, controlling command of your God – even if things feel like they are spiraling out of control, the Almighty promises he is still guiding all things for your eternal good.

There is, however, another side to the coins of the “omnis” of God...

God is everywhere – that means he’s also behind every closed door and in every back seat on a Friday night.

God knows everything – that means he knows not only the number of hairs on our heads but also every unspoken thought that runs through your head.

God is almighty – that means he has the power to judge and punish people who make a mess of his world by living selfishly.

In our Gospel this morning we are reminded that Jesus is watching – omnipresent and omniscient, there are two sides to this coin. That’s comforting because the Jesus who is watching over you doesn’t slumber or sleep, he’s never off on some cosmic coffee run or taking a nap. But there’s also a warning on the other side of that coin – Jesus is watching every area of our lives, even the parts we may not be so keen to have him observe.

“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and **watched** the crowd putting their money in to the temple treasury.”

Apparently, Jesus cares even less about our privacy than Google, Facebook, and Amazon. Can you imagine if later this service, when the offering plate is going around, Pastor Adams and I strolled the aisles, following ushers around, watching what each of you put in the offering plate as it goes by? Many of you’d probably be pretty put off if we did that! And it begs the question: if there is part of you that thinks it would be wrong if your pastors did that, do you feel the same way about Jesus doing that? **Should Jesus really be watching our wealth?**

The fact that Jesus sits down to watch people give offerings seems odd, especially when you consider *when* he did this. This was the Tuesday of Holy Week. Three days later he would be hanging on a cross. With the clock ticking on his earthly ministry, what does Jesus do with the precious time he has left? He *sat down* in the temple to *watch* people as they gave their offerings (and the Greek word used for *watch* here implies intense, ongoing study, so not just sneaking a peak out of the corner of his eye as he sits there, but like a toddler who doesn’t know not to stare, just sitting there watching). As privacy loving 21st century Americans, thinking of Jesus sitting there, watching, staring, studying, I think most of us would be pretty uncomfortable in that situation.

If I’m giving advice to Jesus, him sitting there on this Tuesday, watching like this (not that any other Tuesday would be much better, but especially on this Tuesday), it doesn’t send the right message. Don’t you know that how we spend our money, especially how much of our money we keep vs. how much we give away is an intensely personal thing? You are going to give the wrong impression, that you are just all about money, that you actually care about what people give to you.

But, Jesus didn’t ask my advice. He sat there staring away and what did he see?

“**Many rich people threw in large amounts.**”

This isn’t all that surprising. We expect rich families to be the big givers. After all, Jesus once said, “**From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.**” If Jesus gives you a lot he expects you to give a lot. But, it turns out, Jesus wasn’t just watching the amount of their gifts, he was also watching their reasons for giving. He watched and saw nothing noteworthy, nothing special, even though they gave a lot.

Then Jesus saw another person – not the kind of person you would mistake for a big giver. Can you picture the scene?

“**But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.**”

At first there doesn’t seem to be all that much surprising about this woman either. A poor person living in a time long before social safety nets puts in two tiny copper coins – the bare minimum that was required for the temple tax.

It doesn’t seem all that surprising until Jesus speaks up: “**Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.’**” This poor widow that no one else took notice of, she was noteworthy to our Savior. Can you picture the disciple’s confusion? Jesus explains: “**They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.**”

As Jesus sat there watching, he saw the rich give out of their wealth. Sure they may have given thousands, but they still had thousands left over – a nice offering, perhaps, but nothing noteworthy. They went home to comfortable houses, full fridges, and cozy beds. They gave big gifts, but they weren’t *sacrificial* gifts. They may have had a little less extra money laying around but they still had plenty of money to live comfortably.

The widow was different. She didn’t give the frosting off the sides of the cake because she didn’t have any cake. Instead, she gave her daily bread! She gave “**all she had to live on!**” She didn’t give thousands, just a few cents. But the sacrifice was total. She gave until she had *nothing* left, but at that moment she still had a Jesus who saw her sacrificial gift and took note.

This is the big point today: that widow gave beyond her ability to give, because she trusted her Lord’s ability to care for her. She cared more about showing love and trust to her God than filling her stomach. And the God who was watching, noticed.

I’ll be real honest with you guys. This little widow puts me on notice – she puts me to shame.

I don’t remember ever in my life doing what this widow did. Sure, there has been, and is, a certain level sacrifice to the giving I’ve done, but not like this; not giving away every last penny kind of sacrifice.

And looking at my heart I know why that is.

One of my favorite little snippets from Jesus' life is when this desperate dad approaches him. He's got a demon possessed kid, and he hopes Jesus will be able to help, "Jesus *if* you can do anything, please!" Jesus says, "*If?!?*" Where's the trust? At his wits end that dad cries out, "I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief."

And there it is, the reason why this widow puts me to shame; I'm made of the same stuff as that dad. "*If* I give sacrificially Jesus, will he really be able to help me? Will he still provide for me?" In my heart is that same exhausting battle between belief and unbelief. I wrestle with trusting Jesus enough to give until it hurts.

And I'd be willing to bet at least two copper pennies, that all of you are right there with me. And do you want to know the real sobering part about all of this? Jesus is still watching – just as intently as ever, our omniscient, omnipresent Jesus is watching. Pastor Adams and I won't be following the ushers around watching what you put in the plate, but Jesus is.

So, let's talk about sacrificial giving because there are a lot of ways we can do this wrong – even if we were to give away our last two pennies.

First of all, let's talk about reasons not to give sacrificially. From the time of Cain and Abel, God has made very clear that not every sacrifice is an acceptable, noteworthy sacrifice.

If you sacrifice for Jesus hoping that other people will think highly of you God is not impressed (like maybe some of those rich folks in the temple dropping their large amounts of coins into this box may have felt, looking over their shoulders to see who noticed how much they gave). If I give hoping that others will notice, the coins may have gone to God, but at least some of the honor is kept for myself. Can I be real honest here and say this is one of the reasons why I am not a fan of putting the names of donors on the things they have given to God. Who is being honored when that is the case?

If you sacrifice for Jesus hoping that you will feel better about yourself, God is not impressed. You may go home today and think, "Oof, Pastors Hoff and Adams have been talking tough the last few weeks. I'm feeling guilty. I don't like feeling guilty. So, I'm going to give until I feel good about myself again." But here's the really important thing, God isn't impressed with that motive either. God doesn't want you to sacrifice because you feel like you *have* to. God doesn't want or need you to sacrifice to try and earn a guilt-free conscience. That's not how guilt is removed in God's order of things.

Sacrifice is not about making others think better of you, it's not about you feeling better about yourself, it's certainly not about improving your standing before God – sacrificial giving doesn't earn anything from God.

Here's the only sacrifice God finds noteworthy: a sacrifice given in trust and gratitude and joy.

Trust. Trust that the God who makes the sun rise and the rain fall on the believer and the unbeliever, whether you are asking him for it or not, will continue to give you each day your daily bread. Trust that the God who created this world (who created you) will continue to sustain this world.

Trust and Gratitude. Gratitude that realizes that even if my offerings never reached the noteworthy level of that widow, I still have a God who takes note of me because of Jesus; gratitude that flows from the realization that my relationship with God is not secured through the level of my sacrifice, but because of Jesus' sacrifice. This thing that I wrestle with so much (being willing to sacrifice until it hurts for God), he did not hesitate to do for me. He sacrificed till it hurt and then some so that my sins could be forgiven, so that God could take note of me, and love me.

Trust, gratitude, and joy. God loves and takes note of a cheerful giver, not a self-promoting giver, not a guilty giver, but a cheerful giver – a giver who constantly remembers how incredibly rich we are; not just rich with earthly possessions but rich with love and forgiveness and eternity because of Jesus.

God takes note of givers who bask in how immeasurably much he has given us, who don't have to think twice about generously giving back to him because we are filled with trust, gratitude, and joy.

Jesus is watching. For the part of our hearts still wrestling with trust issues, that is a sobering reminder we need. But Jesus sat there watching as a man who was about to sacrifice everything for those temple goers (rich and widow alike), a sacrifice he made for us. He continues to watch over us with love and forgiveness and he is watching to see how we will respond.

God grant that the more we learn about his love for us, the more we respond with open hearts, open minds, and open hands.
Amen.