

Making Change in the Plate

Faith writer Allen Povenmire was taking up an offering in church on the last night of Vacation Bible School. He had finished with the back row and headed up the middle aisle of the church, offering plate in hand.

“As I neared the front of the sanctuary, I heard a woman’s voice behind me,” he said. “I turned and saw a small, frail-looking woman pursuing me up the aisle with money in her hand. Still nothing that unusual, I’m thinking that somehow we just missed her.”

He didn’t recognize the woman; she wasn’t a regular in the church. She was middle-aged, maybe in her 50s, and wasn’t particularly well dressed.

“Since we were standing at the front of the sanctuary, with nothing else going on, no doubt the majority of the audience witnessed what occurred next,” Povenmire related.

“The woman approached me with her bill in hand and I held out the plate to accommodate her. I couldn’t help but notice her place a \$20 bill on top of the pile of bills already in the plate. I started to turn toward the altar, and she quietly but firmly said, ‘Please wait.’ I looked at her as she proceeded to rifle through the bills in the plate, looking for change for the \$20 she had put in the plate.”



It was sort of a surreal moment, Povenmire recalled. Someone making change in the offering plate. “I heard a few muffled whispers throughout the sanctuary. I awkwardly waited as she finished her transaction and returned quickly to her seat. I put the plate in its appointed place and walked away, still somewhat confounded by what I’d witnessed.”

In reflecting on that experience, Povenmire said one lasting thought came to his mind – the woman didn’t have to give anything at all. “She had the appearance of one who didn’t have much to give, but she gave anyway,” he said.

“She could have stayed seated, saving herself the pointed attention of coming up the aisle. Maybe that \$20 represented a great amount to her, and her giving a portion of it was really a big deal,” he added. “It might have been a bigger sacrifice than any of us who initially scoffed at her actions realized.”

(more)

Jesus had something pointed to say about a similar story in the Gospel of Mark:

Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites (a mite's value was roughly half a penny), which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood (Mark 12:41-44 NKJV).

The question for us today: In mulling over Povenmire's story – that woman walking down the aisle with her offering – her humility leaves a lasting impression on me.

Would you – would I – be too prideful to carry out her act?

– Beecher Hunter