

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

Rev. Dr. John V. Callahan Jr.

Sermon Text: Mark 12:38-44

Sermon Title: "Not Making a Big Deal about It" (Traveling through Mark's Gospel)

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Does anybody know who Andy Ashby is? How about Kerry Ligtenberg? Or Rudy Seanez? These names might not be familiar to most of us. Okay, how about the name Greg Maddux? Or, Tom Glavin? Bobby Bonilla, Andruw Jones, and Andres Galarraga? Those names should be very familiar to those who know anything about the Atlanta Braves. All the names I gave you came from the 2000 Atlanta Braves roster.¹ Even John Rocker was on that list, along with Chipper Jones.

Most of us are not baseball enthusiasts, but we know this about baseball: Those who make a big mark on the game are remembered. Those who hit the most homeruns or pitch the most wins are going to become legends of baseball, and may some day make it to the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. Joe Bagodonuts who played outfield some of the time, who got the most strikeouts on the team, who got sent down to the minor leagues too many times, isn't going to be remembered. The ones who got smaller salaries will be

¹ <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/teamstats/roster.php?y=2000&t=ATL>

forgotten as soon as they leave the ballfield.

That is how sports work. This is not how God works. God views the accomplishments of people in a different way.

Jesus issues a warning to his disciples and to anybody else standing around him. He says, "Beware of the scribes." The Greek word is *blepo*, and it means to see and discern, to study and discover and understand something. So Jesus says, "*Blepo* the scribes." Take a good look at them and see what they are about. They are all looking good. They are all about drawing attention to themselves by wearing long robes to show that their station in life is more important than yours. They love to walk around as though they are more pious than thou, and they love people to notice them in the marketplaces. They love to walk in the synagogues, and have people offer them the best seats. They love to be asked to pray, and when they do they go on and on and on, just to prove how eloquent they can sound in front of others. They love the best parties and the places of honor in them. How would a newly-married couple at their wedding reception like it if one of these scribes waltzed in with his long fancy robe? He would steal the glory away from the couple. The best food and drink would go to

him, and the couple would be treated as second rate.

Anyhow, this is what Jesus wants the people to be watchful for. Notice how these people act, how they love all the attention, and how the people themselves may give them too much attention.

And to top it all off, these long-robed religious leaders also take money from widows who have no means of income. According to Josephus who was a historian around the time of Jesus, some of the religious leaders would create scams to take money and possessions from women, especially widows who had no husbands or family to tell them they were being cheated.² These women would see the leaders are high-holy men, and give them everything. Unlike Robin Hood, some of the rotten scribes would steal from the poor and give to themselves. They preyed on people's weaknesses, making them even weaker.

“*Blepo*,” Jesus says. Observe, take note, and understand how deceptive these people are. They are that way because they forgot their duties to God. They know the law of God backwards and forwards, because the scribes probably memorized the whole Scripture as a part of their training. Yet, although they know God's law by heart, they forgot how to employ it. They forgot

² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, cf. 314.

how to make it relevant, how to make it true, in their lives and the lives they touched on a daily basis. “They were in love with themselves,” and they forgot how to love God.³

It can happen to any of us. We don't have to be scribes or pastors or elders to forget who we are and whose we are. We may become cocky. We may think ourselves too important to do something for somebody. We might think doing something is way below us, or it should be somebody else's job to do it.

And so when we get this way, we need a touch of humility. We need to be knocked down from our high pedestals of arrogance. We need to be dragged from our lofty towers of selfishness. We need God to help us realize that we were made to serve him in whatever way we can. We were built to be in contact with others, and for all of us to support one another. Whether we are weak or poor, whether we are doing well enough or are relatively healthy, we too need to make God's word real, relevant, in our lives and the lives we touch.

The word *humility* comes from the same root word as the word *human*. If you say the words together,

³ David Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*, 484.

they almost sound the same. Both humility and human come from the same root word for dirt, *humus*. [Not the Middle Eastern dish with two Ms, but the Latin word for soil and dirt with one M: *humus*.]

The reason human and *humus* are similar is because we come from the same dirt. We come from the same ingredients that God put together to make us his people. We human beings are all alike in God's eyes, having the same elements to use for his purposes. If we came from the same dirt, then none of us can have advantage over the other. Nobody is more important than the other, not in God's eyes.

Humus, human, humility. God molds us, and then breathes his Spirit into us, "giving [us] human life and the awareness of God." We might be born with different talents, and God might call us to do different things, but every one of us is essential to the kingdom of God. "To be humble means to be aware of our grounding" in the Lord.⁴ God relies on each of us to do his work and give him glory.

Mark illustrates this perfectly in Chapter 10 in a little story about giving alms to the temple treasury. The story only lasts four verses, but its impact is huge and lasting.

⁴ N. Graham Standish, *Becoming a Blessed Church*, 139.

Jesus is sitting near the big treasury box of the temple. These boxes around the temple were called the Trumpets, because they were shaped like horns in which you placed your coin.⁵ People could walk by and throw in their money as their tithe to God. Well, at this particular time, Jesus sees a group of wealthy individuals throwing in loads of gold in one of those trumpets. Remember what Jesus said previously about the scribes who love walking around in long robes and love people to notice them. Jesus sees these people giving from their wealth, which seems to mean that they were not giving out of their love. It seems there was not much humility in what they were offering, and that they hoped the temple priests might notice their tidy sums and give them special attention. As they throw in their coins, Jesus notices a quiet widow entering the scene. She approaches the trumpet, the treasury box, and throws in two measly coins. Apparently the rotten scribes didn't get their grubby hands on those two coins, and so she could do whatever she wanted with them. She decides to give all she has, as little as it is, to God in worship.

They get lost in at the bottom of the trumpet with all the coins that the others dumped in. But she is not lost by Jesus. Jesus sees and praises her for what she

⁵ Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, cf. 316.

did. “This poor widow has given more than the others,” he says, “because she gave out of all that she had, which wasn’t anything compared to the others’ wealth.” Jesus is not saying that giving little is better than giving much. Jesus is pointing out how those coins were given. Are they given out of gratitude to God, or out of trying to get people to notice? Is humility involved, or just arrogance?

In God’s kingdom, the world is turned upside down. It isn’t how great we are, but how small we make ourselves. It isn’t how much we can do; it is what we can do, and may we do it out of love and joy and thanksgiving.

It seems that if we want to get God’s attention, we cannot do it with flash or pizzazz. We bring ourselves lowly, humbly, before God, and listen to what God wants us to do, and then simply do it. Be confident, be joyful, and do that which God wants us to do.

There is so much that goes on in this church. Some many people are involved with so many things, that even I don’t know who is doing what around here. It doesn’t matter. It is done. Ministry is carried out, because each one of us has a ministry that God has entrusted us with. Each one of us has a coin to offer, just like the widow did, and we offer it not to get

noticed, not to have people praise us for it. God gave us that coin to offer, and we freely give it back to God with gratitude.

Once in awhile somebody will notice what we do, and make somewhat of a big deal about it, and we feel embarrassed, and wish nobody said anything. We have things like the Man of the Year or the Woman of the Year. We give awards to people during VBS or after a children's musical program. But even though we have moments in which we honor people for their service, those women and men are honored out of their humility. They did what they did, and they do what they do, out of love for God and us. They put their "coins" in the plate as well as in the Sunday School room and in worship and in this community and in their households and in their workplaces and in their neighborhoods. They spread coins all over the place, because God keeps giving them coins to share. People's lives are changed.

Think of it: People who want to be show-offs do not get honored. There is no award for those who blow their own horns. In Mark's Gospel, who is remembered, the scribes who love the attention in their long robes, or the widow who gave everything she had to God?

In God's kingdom, the world is turned upside

down. It isn't how great we are, but how small we make ourselves. It is not the size of the gift but the size of the heart of the giver, who gives without hesitation. It isn't how much we can do; it is what we can do for God's sake.

“We may feel that we have not much in the way of material gifts or personal gifts to [offer to our Lord], but if we put all that we have and are at His disposal, [God] can do things with it and with us that are beyond our imaginings.”⁶

⁶ Ibid., 317.

