PREACHING & TEACHING

Sermon on Giving

Preaching notes on giving for the preacher who is paid out of the offering and knows the congregation knows it. Includes the widow's mite problem, what to say about your own giving, and why transparency about the budget does more than any amount of exhortation.

topic notes · 4 segments

Topic notes. Movement two addresses the conflict of interest directly, which is the thing that makes this sermon believable.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Name the conflict of interest out loud in the first minute. You are asking for money that partly pays you. Congregations know this and a preacher who says it first is trusted far more than one who hopes nobody is thinking it.
- Publish the budget before you preach this, not after. Specific numbers about where money goes persuade more than any theology of generosity.
- Never use giving as a test of spiritual seriousness. It lands hardest on people who have the least.

01. Three texts, three costs

choose one

[Mark 12 is the risky one - see movement three]

2 Corinthians 9:6-15. Cheerful giver, sowing and reaping. The standard text and the one most likely to slide towards transaction if you are not careful with the sowing metaphor.

Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35. The early church holding things in common. Costs you comfort, because it describes something considerably more radical than an offering plate.

Mark 12:41-44. The widow's two coins. Read the surrounding verses before you decide: the passage immediately before is a condemnation of scribes who devour widows' houses, and the one after is about the temple being destroyed.

02. Say the conflict out loud

first minute

[this buys you the rest of the sermon]

I am about to talk about money, and some of what you give pays my salary. That is an awkward thing and I would rather say it than have you thinking it for twenty minutes.

[then say what you personally give, as a proportion rather than a number, if you are willing - it changes the room]

03. The widow's mite problem

the honest reading

[it may be a lament, not a commendation]

The passage is usually preached as praise for sacrificial giving. Read in context it can equally be read as a lament: a poor woman giving everything she had to an institution that Jesus says in the very next breath is about to be torn down, immediately after he condemns its leaders for exploiting widows.

You do not have to settle which reading is right. But using this passage to encourage people on low incomes to give more, without ever mentioning the second reading, is worth thinking hard about.

04. An angle worth taking

if you want it

[the sermon nobody expects]

Preach a giving sermon that tells some people to give less. Anyone giving out of guilt, or beyond what their household can carry, or to buy standing in the room, should stop. A congregation that hears that will trust everything else you say about money.

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