

'Like' Button

a sermon

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Mark 12:38-44

If you've spent any time at all on Facebook, or Twitter, or some other web site or app for social media, then you'll know what a "like" button is.

But maybe you don't know, because you have never been on those sites. When the rest of us talk about friending and following and swiping, you have no idea what we mean. It's okay! You're probably a better person for it!

This is what I mean by a "like" button. When I put something on Facebook, such as the news the other day that Tammi and I found a house in Michigan and Tammi secured the promise of a job, others can see that post. But they can also interact with it. (This is the "social" part of "social media.") They can reply with comments. And they can also "like" it. They can mouse over a "thumbs up" icon and click on it. And when they do, they show that they not only enjoy or approve the post, they show they have "liked" the post.

The cool kids here will know that the options go beyond the original thumbs up sign. There's a heart, a laughing face, a "wow" face, a sad face, and an angry face. Several ways for you to react to a comment, a story, news good or bad or happy or sad.

But of these by far the most common reaction used is the simple "like," the thumbs up.

Other social media sites have "like" buttons, or something, um, like the "like." Usually it's just one option, often a heart or a star. Clicking on that, you can show that you like a post. But what do you do if you agree with someone, you share her perspective, you understand, you sympathize, you hear her — yet what she has written about is her cat getting sick? Somehow "like" doesn't quite fit.

On Facebook, I have seven hundred and fifty one "friends." Sure, okay, I'm a bit proud of that. But I know some people who have a lot more Facebook "friends." And by "a lot," I mean over two thousand. Which means that when people like their posts, a whole *lot* of people like their posts. Does that make what they write better, more likable, than what is shared by those of us who have far fewer of such virtual friends? Does it mean that *they* are more likable?

Most of us have a need to be liked. We crave approval, we hunger for acceptance. It means connection, contact, belonging.

Of course approval is a good thing. But most know that it will never come from all. Pity the one who is always seeking approval, who never stops looking for likes, and who will look anywhere for them. We all have known such people, those who had been starved of approval by loveless and thoughtless parents and now lead their lives searching for approval

under dank rocks and in dark corners,
in bottles and between sheets,
among others likewise starved for approval,
seeking likes and love

from the manipulative,
from the controlling,
from the abusive.

I believe that much of what is likable, worthy of approval and praise, remains hidden from view, ignored by most people. It's shared with few, or perhaps with none at all, so as not to come off as bragging. Lost in the competition for attention, it may be that the truly excellent and beautiful act may go completely unnoticed, as the clamor

of the louder
and bigger
and shinier
but not necessarily better

causes most to overlook the hidden jewel that is worthy of praise, and prompts hardly any to press the "like" button.



One day Jesus was people-watching.

I like that. And I find it a bit comforting: Jesus people-watching, just as many of us do.

Anyway, Jesus was in the temple, and he sat there watching all these people put money into the temple treasury. Quite a crowd during the offering! Yeah, there were a lot of people, and it was a busy, noisy scene, with all these generous individuals dumping their money into the treasury box.

They didn't have paper money, of course.

Or checks.
Or credit cards.
Or Apple Pay.
Or Google Pay.

They had coins:

big coins,
little coins,
heavy coins,
light coins,
varied in size
and weight
and denomination.

All these coins would be dumped into that big wooden box for collecting the contributions, where they would rattle around and echo throughout the place.

And what a difference in sound! Someone rich would come along, and dump in a large bag of big coins; and the raucous, happy noise would grab everyone's attention. It would be

obvious to all that here was a big giver, so generous in supporting the godly work of the temple with this large donation;

— while other people would put in maybe the same number of coins, but they would be smaller and weigh less, clearly having lesser value than the heavier coins. And these would make a different sound: lighter, higher pitched, neither as sonorous nor as loud as those that came from the bags of the rich.

People gave in amounts that made more noise or less, and clearly the biggest thrills were generated by the loudest and most sonorous clatter of coins cascading down the chute into the box, indicating great numbers of very large and thus costly coins.

And with that noise, with the loud demonstrations of generosity, those gathered in the temple would give their approval, and would (if they could) click on “like” buttons, with nods and with mutters of “there ya go!” and maybe, on occasion, even with cheers.

These were the economics of giving in those days: generosity was measured by the size of the donation.

More giving, more likes; less giving, not so many likes.



Jesus was still people watching. And eventually an old woman, very small, very poor, came up to the box. She dropped in her donation, but it made hardly any noise at all, only a soft “plink – plink” that no one could hear.

That’s right.

No one heard.

No one noticed.

Which means that no one liked.

Well, almost no one.

Jesus did.

He noticed.

He knew.

And, wow, did he *like*.

Because Jesus saw something that not everyone saw ... but they *could* have seen it if they had just paid attention, if their eyes had been guided by hearts filled with compassion and souls hungry for justice.

What *he* saw was that this woman was poor, desperately so.

What he saw was that what she gave cost her dearly.

And what he saw was that all these enthusiastically “liked” big-time givers, the wealthy who were commended for their loud and weighty generosity, they gave what was comfortable for them to give.

Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on. (vss. 43–44)

When it came to the poor widow, Jesus was impressed, but as far as the wealthy who loudly dumped their excess treasure into the offering bin ... um, not so much.

“Like” button for her.

No “like” button for them.

More than that, Jesus was unimpressed with these big givers. Remember what he says about them? Remember his harsh words about the powerful of the day?

Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation (vss. 38–40).

That's what Jesus says about the muckety-mucks, the wealthy power-people in those days. It's what he says about those who married religion with power and money to leverage even greater power and money, and who did that at the expense of the poor.

They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers.

And then that woman came along and dumped in her last two coins. She received no approval from the crowd. If they even noticed, they sure didn't “like.” They might have even snickered at her, or said something rude about her tiny contribution.

“That's it?”

“Why bother?”

“If you actually took some responsibility for your life”

No one recognized that her poverty was the shameful reason for the supposed generosity of those big givers.

No one acknowledged that they had built their wealth on the backs of people just like that widow.

No one recognized her gift as a courageous act of faith.

No one saw that their giving cost them almost nothing, while her giving cost her everything.

No one realized this.

No one, of course, except for Jesus.

He noticed.

He saw.

He knew that her gift showed tremendous faith.

And he knew that the stars of public generosity gathered that day in the temple were not so generous.

He knew that they were frauds.

So it is that Jesus praised that woman,

liked her great and quiet act of faith,
approved what others found unimpressive,

and at the same time he *withheld* his approval from, he registered his profound *dislike* of the widely-admired givers of that day who played in a supposed generosity

that cost them little
and cost others dearly
and impressed a foolish
and credulous
and shallow public.



If this makes you uncomfortable, then good.

If you think that the depth of your generosity and the extent of your faith are great because you give more dollars, or time, or effort, than others give, then you ought to be uncomfortable.

If you have acted as if you are right with God because you gave what is easy for you to give, then you ought to be uncomfortable.

If only now it is occurring to you that the generosity of which you have been so proud represents no great sacrifice on your part, then you ought to be uncomfortable.

If you have even given the hint of believing that you are a better Christian because your efforts at and for this church or another are visible to all, then you ought to be uncomfortable.

If you harbor the illusion that God, who has been so generous to you, desires no generous response on your part, then you had better be uncomfortable.

Yes, you should be uncomfortable.

However, if what Jesus said about that widow gives you comfort, then good. Some of you should surely be comforted by his words.

Actually, even those of us who are squirming with discomfort may find comfort profound and freeing in what Jesus says.

It should comfort you that God sees the good in you and the good you do, even when it is hidden.

It should comfort you that what is small in the eyes of the world may be great in the eyes of Jesus.

It should comfort you that neither wealth nor poverty define you.

It should comfort you that who you are and who you may be,

your possibility,
your destiny,
your purpose,

are held and determined and blessed by God.

It should comfort you that your limitations are understood by God.

It should comfort you that, in Jesus Christ, God is ready and eager and able to approve you.

It should comfort you that the good news spoken to you, yes you, is that, in Christ Jesus, God *does* approve you.

You are liked.

Even more, you are loved.

Never forget that.

My dear friends, never forget that.