

## EXTRAVAGANCE

**Psalm 16 (responsively)**  
**Mark 12: 38-44**

**Faith Community**  
**November 12, 2006**

### Introduction

You may recall Oseola McCarty. She washed people's clothes for a living. She did them all right there in her modest little house in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

She started washing clothes when she was a little girl - still in grade school. She charged a \$1.50 per bundle when she first started; as inflation rose her prices went up. Eventually she would get \$10 per bundle. When she did that she was able to put some money away in savings.

When she was in the sixth grade at Eureka Elementary School, her aunt had to go to the hospital. Oseola says, "I had to go wait on her. When she came out of the hospital, she couldn't walk, and she needed me." Ms McCarty never went back to school. She went back to washing and ironing clothes.

In 1964 her mother died, and in 1967 her aunt died. They each left her some money, which she put in the bank. Her uncle gave her the simple home she still lived in. She never owned a car; she walked everywhere she went. She once showed a friend the grocery cart she pushed more than a mile to get to the Big Star.

After her mother died, she began to wonder what she would do with herself. She talked to people at the bank who referred her to the trust officer. She told him how she wanted to distribute her money. He laid out dimes on his desk to help her visualize the percentages of her money she could give to others.

She set aside one dime for her church - 10 percent. She set aside one dime for each of several relatives she wanted to give money to. She slid six dimes together to represent what she wanted to give to The University of Southern Mississippi.

The administration of the University was shocked when they learned that she had given them \$150,000. William Pace, executive director of the Southern Miss Foundation said, "This is by far the largest gift ever given (to us) by an African American. We are overwhelmed and humbled by what she has done."

Oseola McCarty said, "I just want the scholarship to go to some child who needs it, to whoever is not able to help their children. I'm too old to get an education, but they can." She added, "I can't do everything, but I can do something to help somebody. I wish I could do more."

You may have heard about Oseola because eleven years ago her story hit the news. People were amazed that an ordinary woman like this would leave a small fortune to a university she had never attended.

It is pretty amazing. With that money she could have set herself up in a very comfortable retirement center with all the amenities. She could have bought a beautiful home and had people come in to take care of her. She could easily have gone out for dinner every night (and every other meal) and still had money left over. But she gave her money to help poor kids who wouldn't be able to go to college. *What an extravagant gift!!*

## I

Jesus sits with his disciples outside the temple, opposite the charity box, known as the tzedakah. While they are sitting there talking, they watch wealthy people come by and put in large offerings.

Then a poor widow arrives and she puts in two leptons – worth about a penny. As Jesus watches, he is moved. He turns to his disciples and says, “I’m telling you this poor widow has given more than anybody else. They gave out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had to live on.”

She obviously hadn’t thought this through. Her little gift – a penny – isn’t really going to do much to help anybody. Besides, who is more in need than she is? The practical thing is for her to hold on to what she has and try to get some food with it. Her action isn’t prudent.

## II

And yet Jesus praises her for her action. She gave far more than anybody else. She gave everything.

Why didn’t Jesus go and stop her from making that gift? Or why didn’t Jesus run and dig out her coin and give it back to her. “Take this back; you need it as much as anyone who will get this help.”

She didn’t think the situation through carefully. She didn’t use common sense. She didn’t analyze what she was doing. She just wasn’t careful. And Jesus praised her as the best.

To lots of people we need to say: “Be prudent. Think through carefully what you are doing before you act. Save your money. Be cautious.”

To others we need to say: “Let loose. Unclasp your grip. Let go. Act wildly. Do something extravagant for other people!”

## III

To be Christian is to receive extravagance – and to be extravagant!

There was a young man who gave up everything to come into this world. He taught and healed thousands of people. He angered the authorities. The people of his own hometown rejected him.

He was arrested, tortured, and nailed to a cross, all because he loved these people.

He could have had the best there is, but he gave it up for the people he cared about. His gift, there on the cross, was an act of divine extravagance.

## Conclusion

Jesus praised this widow at the charity box. If you listen carefully you can hear him praise Oseola, too. Jesus gave us his own gift. These were extravagant, reckless, acts of giving. They acted with extraordinary generosity. And God blessed them all.

Amen