

I apologize to some of you for sharing this information but the Clemson football coach, Dabo Sweeney has a motto. He asks his players and he asks the fans if they are “all in.” Are you “all in?” Meaning, is everyone giving their all to help the team achieve its goals?

That’s a good question to ask all of us this morning. Are we who sit in this room and call ourselves Christians “all in?” Or are we just partially in? Do we even know anymore what it means to be “all in?” I have been wondering this week if the expression of the Christian faith today is something that is pretty close to what has happened to apples.

In 1905, there were more than 6,500 distinct varieties of apples in this country. There were apples for keeping, cooking, eating and the making of ciders, with names as colorful as they were various. Names such as Scollop Gillyflower, Red Winter Pearmain, Kansas Keeper.

But when you think of apples today, how many apple varieties do we know that are out there? According to one estimate, only 11 varieties make up 90 percent of all the apples sold in this country, and Red Delicious alone counting for nearly half of that. What has happened is that we have produced more generic apples for our more generic tastes. We have become more concerned with mass production than we have with distinctiveness. Bland, bland, bland. Food has become so bland.

Think about that in terms of our expressions of our Christian faith. In order to not offend anyone and to increase attendance and to increase giving to the church, we have become more and more generic. We ask less and less of one another so that the most common indicator of how vital a congregation is is the number of people who are sitting their fannies in pews on Sunday mornings and how much we put in the offering plate.

The Christian church and we Christians who make up the organized church have become a very generic and safe group of people. And as long as you and I show up in worship every so often and give a little bit of money to support the institution then we are doing enough to satisfy the requirements of being a generic Christian.

There are generic followers in the story which Mark tells about Jesus. These generic followers are called scribes. Scribes like to be prominent in the community. They like to hang with the prominent people. Scribes like to be seen as somebody. They like having the best seats in the synagogues.

Do you know that in American churches it used to be the custom that families would rent the pews in the church? The most expensive pews were in the front of the sanctuary and the folks who couldn't afford a pew had to sit in the back. Of course, the slaves were in the balcony. What happened in church on Sunday morning was no different than the stratification that was happening in the society on Monday. Those who had stuff were treated better than those who had nothing.

In this story that Mark tells, Jesus is sitting down opposite the treasury and watches as the crowds put their money in the treasury. Many rich people put in large amounts of money. But a poor widow comes forward and puts in two small copper coins, money which amounts to about 1 penny. This is a woman who was dependant on someone else to provide for her. You don't read of rich widows in the Bible.

Women in the society were dependent upon husbands to provide for their financial means. And this woman had lost it all. She had lost her husband and she had lost her only means of support. And not only had she lost it all, the rich people were trampling her down with their systems which favored the rich and burdened the poor.

Upon seeing all of this, Jesus doesn't celebrate the gift of the rich and famous and he doesn't support the system which gives nice tax incentives to the wealthy. Jesus instead celebrates the gift of this poor widow. Jesus would say that she was "all in" because even though she did not have very much she was willing to be generous with what she had.

Are you and I all in? Or are we simply Christians who go through the motions, do the generic rites that we think are all that is required of us, and then think that this is all that there is in life? Is it worth doing any more than that? Is it worth the effort?

Maybe you and I should try an experiment this week to see if we are willing to really be all in with following Jesus. What if you and I took out a certain amount of money out of our bank account or retirement account or piggy bank this week and imagined that we are the poor widow in this story.

Let's imagine that we look at whatever amount we have decided to use for our experiment and say to ourselves, this is everything that I think I possess. This week I am going to use this money in such a way that I am going to show total dependence upon God.

For some of us, that is probably going to be a quarter or a dollar. For some of us, it might be taking out \$20. For some of us, it could be \$1,000. For some of us, it could be more. Whatever amount you think would be an amount that would actually make a dent in your checkbook and make you a little nervous.

Take that amount of money and make a commitment this week that you are going to give that money away in such a way that you think it will show that you have a total dependence upon God. There may be someone that comes into your life and you think, I need to give this money to this person. There may be a cause that you become aware of this week and you are going to give to that cause.

But let me then add another challenge on top of this. When you have this money in your possession, think about how to give this money away in such a way that you also are giving your time to someone in need. For instance, instead of just giving to, let's say, PATH, contact PATH and say that I have a certain amount of money to give and I want to give my time to you as well.

Instead of just giving your money to an organization that offers to take a child to something they couldn't afford on their own, offer to donate that money and take that child yourself or chaperone a trip with other adults. Instead of just giving money to the church, contact me or an elder and say I want to donate this money to the church but I also want to donate my time to benefit someone in a very real way.

For instance, someone approached me this week wanting to do some home repairs for folks who do not have the resources for home repairs. What if you contacted me to say I am giving a certain amount of money to repair a home or two and I am willing to help with my time as well? What if you contact me and say I want to see such and such happen and I am donating this amount of money and this amount of time?

Of course, you and I don't have to do this. No one expects you and me to. We are all expected to just be generic apples like everyone else. We are all just expected to be boring Christians who sit in pews on Sunday morning, donate out of our abundance, and live decent lives. Bland, bland, bland.

Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to give out these Bibles this morning to some of the young people. Because they might just read it. And if they read it, it might just challenge them to change their lifestyles and the lifestyles of their parents. Be careful, it is a dangerous collection of books.

They might just read this story of this widow who lost it all but gave what remained in her possession because she wanted to be “all in.” I wonder what it would be like in worship next week if when I asked for prayer concerns and celebrations; you came into worship next Sunday and said, let me tell you what I experienced this week.

I had these two small copper coins and I gave them to such and such and then I gave my time and .... Who knows what might happen. I don't know. Generic Christians wouldn't have to worry about it because generic Christians wouldn't do this kind of thing. Generic Christians just lead predictable lives. Bland, bland, bland.

There is something else that is interesting about all of these apply varieties that we used to have. There are actually still some old trees that can be found that have some of these forgotten varieties. Diversity in apples is still possible.

You and I are capable to taking our two small copper coins whatever that amount is for you and doing something that makes a real difference.

It might be kind of fun to find out this week if this story of two small copper coins is really true. AMEN.

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-Klinkenborg, Verlyn, "Apples, Apples, Apples," NY Times 11/6/09 and found at

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/06/opinion/06fri4.html?\\_r=1&th&emc=th](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/06/opinion/06fri4.html?_r=1&th&emc=th)

-Texts: Deut. 15: 7-11; Mark 12: 38-44

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