

16th Sunday after Pentecost September 29 2019

Amos 6:1a, 4-7; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

The Pharisees were those Jews associated with a certain understanding of Judaism. While there were those who were rich and well educated among their number, these were not the powerful elite. Think of it as an upper middle-class school of thought. One that often clashed with Jesus and his teachings. As we've seen before, Jesus has been engaged with the Pharisees, especially around issues of wealth, all through the Gospel up to this point.

The Pharisees, Jesus says, are operating under the economy of their day and they have forgotten the economy God taught them wandering in the wilderness. The economy of manna.

When the Jews were enslaved in Egypt they lived to survive. As with most enslaved people you would tend to hoard food and other essentials, not knowing when you might get access to them again. You focus on yourself and your family, just to survive.

So, in the wilderness, God taught them a different way to live. The economy of manna and quail. Every morning, the Jews would go out and on the ground would be the manna provided by God. And they would collect enough for their household for the day. It tasted like wafers made with honey. What happened if you reverted to the economy of your enslavement and tried to collect more than you needed for the day? If you tried to keep some over until tomorrow? It bred worms and became foul.

And who got the manna from God? The deserving? The righteous? Nope. Everyone. Everyone got enough for the day, whether they walked the whole day or were slacking on the back of the wagon. Whether they were warriors or children. Whether they had a large family or small. Everyone got enough to live for the day. And they learned to trust God to provide their daily bread. That God would always give them, enough.

It's the same economy Jesus points to in the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Everyone gets a day's wage whether they worked all day in the blazing sun or just an hour. Everyone gets enough to buy bread to survive another day. That's God's economy.

But the Pharisees had forgotten this and operated under an economy that says the more you have the more God loves you. That wealth is a visible sign that you are in right relationship with God. That you are righteous. And, conversely, if you are poor, then you must not be living a righteous life, because God rewards God's faithful followers with good things.

This is the same economy that we live under. One in which we are in bondage to and cannot free ourselves. We've even Christianized it.

How many of you have ever said, "I'm so blessed" in reference to the things that you have. I know I've done it. While I appreciate is that what often lies behind that statement is more a thankfulness for what we have and an acknowledgment that all things come from God- (this leans to the economy of manna) But what it literally says is that if someone doesn't have these things, then God has not blessed them, and by implication they are morally bad. Or at least by comparison they are less righteous than we are. How

can you tell? Because I have more stuff. Sound familiar? This is the economy we live in.

We also have secular language for this around wealth, don't we? While there are outliers in each camp, wealthy people are often assumed to have "worked hard" to get their wealth, to get ahead and poor people are often assumed to be "lazy" or at least that hard work will get them society's (and God's) approval by getting wealthier.

Whether the economy we are talking about is the one that the Pharisees live in or the one we are in bondage to, the focus is on wealth. Who has it and who doesn't.

Jesus has been working on the Pharisees for the last 16 chapters. Trying to point them back to the economy of manna. But they refused to see it.

We don't see the encounter that led up to this parable. What happened was the Pharisees were eavesdropping on Jesus' story about the dishonest manager. They heard Jesus tell the disciples that you cannot serve God and wealth. And they respond by ridiculing Jesus. You can almost imagine what they would say, "You've got to be kidding, wealth is how God rewards us for being righteous!"

Jesus' response, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God." Then he tells this parable. One with about as stereotypical a rich man and poor man as you can find. One that describes a rich man neglecting the poor man at his door, one who he knows by name, but who he never even speaks to. One that directly

challenges the Pharisees understanding of the economy of God. Because who winds up in the bosom of Abraham? That points them back to Moses and the prophets (a short-hand for the Hebrew Bible). One that we hear reflected in our reading from Amos, a lament for those who lounge on couches, drink wine, and eat abundantly but do not attend to the ones in need. One reflected in Timothy- the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

We have deceived ourselves and the truth is not in us. How many of us have bought into the idea that our worth in life is connected to our net worth? How many of us, whether we have a lot of it or not, have as the center of our life money? It's the very basis of our society. It seems almost impossible to escape.

Yet, what did Jesus come to do? Even in this deepening engagement with the Pharisees, what is Jesus working hard to do? For them! Look back to chapter 4, the beginning of his ministry, that first time in the synagogue when he unrolls the scroll of the Hebrew Bible to Isaiah 61 and reads his mission statement, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free."

We are in bondage to this economy, and yet we have been freed from it. In the waters of baptism God has named and claimed us as God's. In the waters of baptism we die to that old self and are reborn, free, as children of God. Living in God's economy.

Even so, we can all attest to the reality that it is hard to escape fully. We still live and work too often with this idea that wealth will save. We deceive ourselves that wealth is God's way of saying we're righteous. We're good people. And the bonds of our captivity slip around us again.

But what can we do? This is why we come here every week, my siblings in Christ. Because in this place we are reminded of the economy of God. The economy of manna. Because in this place we experience and practice this economy. We come to confess together the ways in which we have not lived up to who we are as Children of God and to receive forgiveness. We come to be reminded that we live in the manna economy of God, where everyone gets enough for the day. That when we collect more, it breeds worms and turns foul in our mouths. We come to receive the visible reminder of this economy in the meal to which everyone is welcome (righteous and sinner) and in which everyone gets enough.

We come, to be freed. Because if we think about it, this economy we live in is oppressive. For those who are rich as well as those who are not.

We come, to be reminded of our true identity, gained in the waters of baptism. That we are a people who live in an economy of manna.

And then begins the work of figuring out together and for ourselves, what does that look like in our daily lives? What does that look like for how we spend our money? What does that look like for how we help others receive enough for the day?

There are colleagues of mine, you can probably find some online, who will give you 5 steps on how to do this. Who will give you three things to do

today. Perhaps that is the way to go. But I have to say I've always been leery of things that simple.

It has been my experience that what God in Jesus has given us is a set of principles, a set of questions to ask. Do we hold our wealth with a closed fist, or an open hand? Do we believe wealth is a sign of God's blessing, or more an accident of luck and our labor? Do we center our lives on an economy of wealth or an economy of manna? If an economy of manna, what does that mean for how I live? For how I treat my wealth?

God has also given us a community of fellow believers we can talk with about our decisions, who can help us discern the way to go. Why is this important? Because we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, and we trust our siblings in Christ to speak the truth in love to us.

Together, may we live in the freedom that God gives us in knowing that God will always provide enough for the day and that we may be the means by which someone receives that.

Amen.