

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 10:25-37

<sup>5</sup> An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.<sup>[a]</sup> "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup> He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" <sup>27</sup> He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."<sup>29</sup> But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.' <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" <sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

*This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

FIRST READING: Amos 8:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, <sup>5</sup>saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, <sup>6</sup>buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat." <sup>7</sup>The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

*This is the word of the Lord. THANKS BE TO GOD.*

### **“God’s View: Supply & Demand”**

I must admit that AS I looked this week at a garage that is so full of stuff, so full that Mike and I cannot get both of our cars, one for each of us, into it, I felt that the Scripture was speaking to me and me alone. But no, the words, tough as they are, are for, I believe, all of us. In fact, they are AS applicable to us personally and to our nation and our world as they were to the people Israel so long ago. Let’s bravely dive in deep, ok?

I have heard it said that the problem in us and in our nation is wealth and our fear of letting go of it, that *“the American culture is best described as a supermarket and the American citizen as a consumer,”*<sup>1</sup> wherein we all have *too much of a good thing...too much to eat, to buy, to watch, to do.*<sup>2</sup> Certainly, this is true. Yes, we have excess at every turn. However, I am wondering, after contemplating today’s texts, if the real problem may be that we are not living as God’s people, not in the way that God want us to anyway, due to a great disparity between the haves and have nots, relatively few living in abundance and many living in need, some having far, far too much and others have far, far too little. (a few statistics)

In 1980, the average large company CEO made 40 times more than the average employee of their company. Comparable figures in other industrial nations were 20 to 1. Japan’s was 10 to 1. Twenty years later, in 2000, the ratio between CEO and employee compensation in the US had ballooned to be 400 to 1.<sup>3</sup> And a study of 300 top US companies published in 2022 shows that the number has jumped to 670 to 1. Forty-nine firms in this study had ratios above 1,000 to 1. CEOs of these companies made an average of \$10.6m, with the median worker getting \$23,968.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, the World Inequality Database reports that in the last 30 years, the top 10% of us have doubled our total financial holdings while the holdings of the bottom 50% of us have stayed the same. This is important because our holdings are what we use to take care of rainy-

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<sup>1</sup> Will Williamon quoted in John Buchanan. *“The Economics of Faith”* <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2004/071104.html>.(accessed 9-16-22).

<sup>2</sup> Anon. *“All This Prosperity Is Killing Us,”* New York Times, 14 March 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Wil McDonough. Quoted: John Buchanan. *“The Economics of Faith”* <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2004/071104.html>. (accessed 9-16-22).

<sup>4</sup> Anon. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jun/07/us-wage-gap-ceos-workers-institute-for-policy-studies-report#:~:text=A%20study%20...>. (accessed 9-16-2022).

day emergencies, medical necessities, student debt, inheritance, retirement...and it has stayed the same for 50% of people for 30 years<sup>5</sup>.

Data from Oxfam, a global movement to end poverty worldwide, shows that such economic disparity exacerbates gender inequality and causes a range of health and social problems. It stifles social mobility, fuels crime and even violent conflict. Its corrosive consequences affect the poorest people and minorities the most.<sup>6</sup> Nearly 1 in 4 families of color vs. 1 in 10 white families live on <\$24,000/yr.<sup>7</sup> Extreme inequality corrupts politics and hinders economic growth.

All of this, I believe speaks deeply to...well....our lack of responsibility for one another, to our human propensity for greed, to our selfishness and sin. It speaks to the grip that money has on our individual and collective hearts. It speaks to a spiritual crisis. Nicholas Berdyaev, a Central European theologian, once said, *“If I am hungry, that is a physical problem; if my neighbor is hungry, that is a spiritual problem.”*<sup>8</sup>

This is why the Bible, the entirety of it, speaks so much and so often about the enormous temptation on us to accumulate material wealth. We are called to an absolute and different moral imperative. We are mandated to maintain the right of all human beings to have access to resources that make life possible. It is a command founded on God’s view of a moral economy, on taking care of the poor, the weak, the needy, on the treatment of the poor with decency, respect, and generosity. And it is to be realized not only in personal acts of compassion but on initiatives embedded in our society.

No one articulates this more clearly than Amos. In fact, Amos spoke so clearly that he became a social pariah, speaking truth to power. As Kathryn Schifferdecker says, *“he did not comfort the afflicted so much as he afflicted the comfortable.”*<sup>9</sup> *“Give justice to the weak, the orphans and the stranger in the land,”* he said. Amos was sure that God’s judgment was about

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<sup>5</sup> Renn Serna. WID (World Inequality Database) *“God’s Economy”* [https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=811879293051247&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=811879293051247&_rdr) (accessed 9-16-22).

<sup>6</sup> Anon. *“Even it Up: Time to end extreme inequality.”* <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/even-it-up-time-to-end-extreme-inequality-333012/> (accessed 9-16-22)

<sup>7</sup> Renn Serna.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in John Buchanan.

<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Schifferdecker. *“Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.”* <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-25-3/commentary-on-amos-84-7-5>. (accessed 9-16-22).

to be levied upon Israel. And it was because of the prosperous Israelites' oppression of the poor and because of the rampant greed and corruption of the merchant class. He called out the merchants who were tinkering with the value of the currency, inflating it and, at the same time, reducing the value of the standard weight measurement in the marketplace. Sounds a little like the maintaining of high prices after a crisis even though supplies return to normal, doesn't it? Or continuing to charge the same price for less product...and using clever packaging to disguise it?

Jesus, like Amos, also addressed this. In our text today, he did so through the parable of the Good Samaritan. A lawyer, who was testing him, asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus, asked HIM a question: *"What is written in the law? What do YOU read there?"* The man replied, *"Love God and love neighbor"*. *"Right,"* Jesus said, *"so do this, and you will live."* The man seemed unsatisfied. *"But WHO is my neighbor?"* Jesus then described a man who was robbed and beaten and left for dead on the roadside. Two religious men - a priest and a Levite – saw him but passed by. A third, a Samaritan, saw the injured man, tended his wounds, provided shelter and generally went out of his way to help him. *"Who was the neighbor?"* Jesus asked the lawyer. *"The one who showed mercy."* *"Go and do likewise, and you will live!"* Jesus said once again.

In telling the parable, Jesus, like Amos, said that God's way requires us to look for, to see, and then show the person in need mercy, to care and provide for them. The parable also made clear that it is all of our responsibility. NO one has an excuse to ignore this. And no doubt, if Jesus' parable had gone on to include the Samaritan walking the same road the next day and again finding a beaten, robbed victim by the roadside, Jesus would have held up the need for moral change in the society. He would have said that the Samaritan would have not only bound up the man's wounds but would have gone directly to the city council to begin advocating for better protection on the road, and a better, safer roadway.<sup>10</sup> As Desmond Tutu said, *"There comes a*

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<sup>10</sup> John Buchanan.

*point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.*"<sup>11</sup>

Brothers and sisters, we are mandated to live the moral imperative according to God's view of supply and demand, in our personal lives and we are commanded to insist upon it in our society. *"Did you know that in just 1 year, the richest 20 people on earth, made so much money that they could have ended poverty 4 times over?"*<sup>12</sup> Yes, that's right, ended poverty! We need quit believing the lie that there is not enough for all, and trust in, work for God's good plan for the flourishing of all Creation.

It will take courage. It will take courage to insist on this imperative in our own living and in our society. It will take courage because it is very easy, very easy to avoid looking at the horrific images of the hungry and starving, the destitute, the homeless, the trafficked not only in all those other countries but in our own American cities. It will take courage because it requires changes in behaviors, priorities and spending habits... and... change is hard. It will take courage because in this polarized political climate, we may encounter push back, maybe even anger at our position, despite the fact that a bipartisan opinion poll shows that an overwhelming majority (78%) of people of every faith and political party would rather see a policy addressing poverty than almost any other issue.<sup>13</sup> It will take courage. But we cannot experience Jesus' promised blessings of his new life... we cannot really live...now and in the world to come if we do not get free of the grip that money has on us and instead trust and believe. *(pause)*

Friends, I will soon be cleaning out our garage. And I will be endeavoring to do a better job in being a citizen of God's kingdom, rather than a consumer in America. A question that I will try to keep before me is the one asked of Jesus. Maybe you can keep it before you too. *"Teacher, what do I have to do to inherit eternal life?"* The answer we will most certainly hear; *"For my sake, see the hungry and feed them. For my sake, see suffering and tend to their wounds; For my sake, see the poor and provide for them. For my sake, see injustice and right it.*

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<sup>11</sup> Desmond Tutu. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/954454-there-comes-a-point-where-we-need-to-stop-just>. (accessed 9-16-22).

<sup>12</sup> Renn Serna. "God's Economy" [https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=811879293051247&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=811879293051247&_rdr) (accessed 9-16-22).

<sup>13</sup> Jim Wallis (SoJourners) quoted in John Buchanan.

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Luke 18:18-30, 1 Tim 2:1-7

*Do not be afraid, my child, but be courageous. I will be with you... "Do this and you will live!"*

Amen.