Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Financial Stewardship – personal stewardship

*Jesus freely gives of himself for our sake.*

Readings: Amos 6:1-7, Psalm 146, 1 Timothy 6:6-19, Luke 16:19-31

“You have not because you ask not. If you are strong in your faith, then God will reward you with financial wealth and goods.”

This was what I heard on TV once when I was sitting with my mother and she was listening to one of her favorite televangelists. The idea he proposed seemed to make sense. Those who are blessed with wealth and material goods must be favored by God, and therefore those who are not are doing something wrong and are not loved or blessed by God.

This is the idea proposed by such popular things at the Prayer of Jabez, many televangelists like Joel Osteen or Joyce Meyer, popular books such as The Secret, and it is in fact an idea that you can find in parts of Holy Scripture.

Yet at the same time it is an interpretation of Holy Scripture that Jesus himself refutes in our reading today from the gospel according to St. Luke.

Jesus talks more about wealth and possessions in the Bible than any other subject except the Kingdom of God. I think this is because Jesus knows how much money and possessions play a part in human lives and so Jesus wants to make it clear how disciples are called to view and use money and possessions.

Just before our reading Jesus has been giving a series of parables on stewardship and some Pharisees overhear him. The Pharisees then begin to mock Jesus for his views and so Jesus tells them a parable.

The parable descries a rich man who wants for nothing. He has the finest foods every day, and he wears the most expensive clothing. Meanwhile outside his house there is a man named Lazarus who is so poor he is covered in rags, he is covered in sores from an infection, the stray dogs of the town harass him by licking at his sores, and Lazarus is too sick and weak to fight them off.

Lazarus longs for even the smallest crumbs from the rich man’s table. Eventually both the rich man and Lazarus die, and suddenly their roles are reversed. The rich man is being tormented in Hades and Lazarus is brought by Abraham to the never-ending feast of the Messiah.

The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to help him, but Abraham refuses saying there is a chasm between them that can’t be crossed. The rich man then begs Abraham to send Lazarus to warn the family he has left alive so they can avoid his fate. Abraham again refuses saying if they did not listen to the law and prophets which they have before them, and so they will not listen even to someone who rises from the dead.

What is at stake here is how to interpret wealth. In many places our Holy Scriptures describe how money is a sign of God’s blessing. The Pharisees Jesus was talking with knew these scriptures very well.

The problem is when these kinds of scripture are taken out of context of the Bible as a whole. When you do this, as some of the Pharisees were doing, you end up with a formula for God’s love that works like this: wealth/possessions = God’s love for you.

The Pharisees criticizing Jesus may have known Holy Scripture well, but they seem to ignore the prophets who constantly called God’s people to share with one another, and they especially criticized those with wealth, power, and privilege who ignored the needs of those around them. Just look at our reading today from the prophet Amos for example.

Jesus wants to make it very clear that God’s love is **NOT** dependent on the amount in your bank account. Certainly, financial and material wellbeing is a blessing, but it is a blessing that God entrusts to someone for the sake of sharing with those who are without so that the wealthy become a blessing to others, and so that God’s love can flow out into the world.

Jesus did not just preach and teach this message, but Jesus also embodies and lived it. Jesus very birth demonstrates that God deeply loves those in poverty and suffering, because Jesus was not born as a mighty king or rich prince, but Jesus was born to a poor teenage girl name Mary and her young husband Joseph who had nowhere but a barn to stay and an animal feeding bin to place the infant Christ.

Jesus grew and spent his life giving and serving for the sake of others. Jesus gave of himself in preaching and teaching so that people could hear of the Kingdom of God and its welcome to all regardless of wealth, health, gender, age, race, or anything else. Jesus welcomed and loved everyone equally.

Jesus cared for those who suffered, and he gave of himself by healing and casting out demons so that people could be restored in their bodies and in their communities with one another.

When the time came Jesus die not run away to save his own life, but he willingly gave up his very life on the cross so that everyone can receive forgiveness and restoration with God as a free gift of love for all who believe.

Jesus did not stay dead but rose from the dead to bring the gift of eternal life to his disciples so that even death is not the end. Instead the end is that all the faithful are drawn together at the never-ending banquet of Jesus the Lamb of God.

Jesus continues to freely give himself to us in the waters of baptism where we become children of God, and in bread and wine at the altar where we are fed with Jesus very body and blood.

Those who preach and teach that God’s love is directly equal to your finances or possession, or that if you have not it’s because you are not faithful enough are wrong. Jesus does not hold things back from us and his love and value of you is not for sale, because it was purchased willingly by Jesus on the cross already.

Jesus loves you for more than the amount in your bank account. Jesus always gives freely of himself and he does not count some as worth more than others, but instead he deeply loves everyone equally, and he calls his disciples to share with one another and the world so that his love can be seen and felt. Amen.