

Advent 3C: Luke 3:7-18  
December 16, 2018  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

## **‘What then should we do?’**

What should we do? Simple, but maybe hard or not so hard to do:

1. We should care about the world God gave to us to live in.
2. We should care about those less fortunate than ourselves.

It's no fair. It doesn't take long as an adult these days to figure out, life is not fair! Your success in life depends on where you were born and to whom you were born, almost 90% of the time. The distribution of wealth and opportunity is not fair, this is not rocket science. Let's get real. The chances that you will join the 1% "ruling class" in our oligarchy is slim, about as slim or maybe even slimmer than winning the lottery, known as "the poor man's investment scheme." For the last 50 years the rich have been getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and the middle class is disappearing.

Living conditions for many Americans are "not fair." We still live in the third wealthiest state in the union and yet our urban areas rank amongst the bottom ten percent in poverty. How can there be such a disparity between wealth and poverty in a state which is so blessed? Surely this should rise to the top of our local agenda, yet it has not done so in my lifetime, despite the efforts of many to make it a priority. Many Native Americans out West are forced to live in third world conditions, the poverty is so bad.

The so-called 1% have a growing hold over our life together and they can afford to. This hold is not, as is popularly noted an "us versus them" political issue, because this hold transcends political parties. And we should not be surprised. Greed and the lust for power have corrupted a select few who control the lives of others for years, even centuries, no, even millennia. Indeed the Baptist indicated this in the opening words of today's Gospel:

"You brood of vipers! [referring to the 1% of his day] Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ...Do not begin to say to yourselves 'We have Abraham as our ancestor; for I tell you God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham...Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'"

Remember the scheming Herod who slew the children of Bethlehem while seeking to destroy Jesus? He spent Israel into the poor house building palaces to protect himself. He constructed the fortress at Masada, if you remember that place where the Jews would later make their last stand against the Romans around 70 AD. He feasted and wore fine garments of expensive cloths of gold and silver while the poor starved and suffered outside his door. There is nothing new under the sun!

Remember the words of caution about hoarding wealth and selfishness in the writings of Charles Dickens in the greatest Christmass tale of the season [other than the Gospel itself], as he described the life and deeds of Ebenezer Scrooge. “I pay my taxes for the work houses and the poor houses.” (These were horrible places where families were split apart, children forced into labor and men and women forced into slavery for a few crumbs of food, a stone soup, and a miserable indoor bed crawling with bugs to sleep in.) And how often I have heard the cry that “the poor today are living a life in the lap of luxury, not having to work while on the public dole, while I am working to pay for this through my taxes.” Sound like Ebenezer? I guess the story of Scrooge did not sink in. There is nothing new under the sun!

Or get this: I picked up the paper and read about this sale in the real estate section of the paper: In Boca Raton, Florida: “The custom designed lakefront mansion with more than 27,000 square feet has 7 bedrooms and 14.5 bathrooms. [maybe the former owner had some bladder problems?] Amenities include a movie theater, a sports bar, a gym, a recording studio and an underground wine cellar. It includes an Olympic style Ping-Pong room. [Whatever that is?] The property also includes a swimming pool [even though it is less than a mile from the Atlantic Ocean and beautiful beeches, as well as it sits on a lake where you can also swim and boat] It has a clay tennis court and an outdoor kitchen with a real pizza oven and has a pair of motor courts. And this home was only used for “a few months a year” by the former owner. It sold for a whopping \$25,000,000. Dollars. It was owned by a sports team owner, whose estimated wealth is 2.6 billion dollars. Who needs all that? There is nothing new under the sun!

Preparing yourself for the future is not about buying an expensive alarm system to protect yourself or collecting more stuff to fill your already over-stuffed home, if you are like me. It is about looking at what I can begin to share with others from the abundance of blessings with which God has blessed me.

I can let go and let God in and share what I have with others. At first it seems hard, but soon I feel like a great stone, a great weight has been lifted from my back. Learning to live simply that others may simply live only compounds the blessings

which God has already given to me. It is by far the best investment in the future you can make. Isn't the smile on a child's face worth so much more than the momentary pleasure of acquiring some new possession? Isn't the feeling of hope and joy of seeing the relief on someone's face when they get some food they really need, better than satiating your own desires?

What then should we do? Well we could get angry about the injustice and unfairness of the distribution of wealth. Many feel this sharply right now. But while anger may produce the passion to do something about it, we also know that it is difficult and very unlikely to produce much if any change. Anger only eats away at yourself like a cancer, leaving you bitter and depressed. What then should I do? Should I throw in the towel and surrender to what seems like overwhelming odds against changing anything? Is there no hope?

What then should we do? We—you and I—can fight these injustices on an individual level by really caring for others in our daily lives, sharing our bounty and gifts with others. You can make a huge difference by touching just one life, by helping just one person. And we know that we can even do so much more than this. We are an army of Christian soldiers marching as to war, only not a war against others, but a war which sets out to bring peace on earth, good will toward our fellow human beings. Together we do make a difference, not measured in numbers or in earthly wealth, but with a treasure from heaven of unfathomable value: the love of God spread with your hands and heart. AMEN