**Sermon By Rev. Steve McPeek - Proper 20**

**September 22, 2019**

**St. Augustine of Canterbury**

**Luke 16:1-13**

**INTRODUCTION**

Our Gospel reading today is a challenging one to understand. Reading through various commentaries and sermons did not help at all. It only verified how challenging it is.

If we read through Luke, we see that Jesus is working hard to communicate with us what is pleasing and good from God’s perspective. Luke tells 3 stories of rich men. The first (Luke 12:15-21) is about a rich man who decides to build bigger barns to store up his grain and goods. God calls him a fool and says he will die that night. It’s an indictment against those who hoard things for themselves and are not rich towards God.

The second story (Luke 16:1-13) is our reading from today in which Jesus challenges his followers to faithfulness with earthly wealth because it has an impact on heavenly wealth and puts them before a choice by saying, “You cannot serve God and wealth.”

The third story (Luke 16:19-31) is about a rich man who enjoyed the fine things of life during his lifetime while others like Lazarus who were poor suffered around him. When he dies, he sees Abraham and he calls out to him for help. Abraham says to him, “During your lifetime you received good things, whereas Lazarus received terrible things. Now Lazarus is being comforted and you are in great pain.” This seems to caution us about neglecting those who are poor and needy.

These three stories are just a small excerpt on the topic of wealth in the Bible. The way we handle money, resources and wealth is a huge topic throughout scripture and throughout the history of the church.

**GOOD NEWS**

I have good news and bad news for you today. Since I am the new old kid on the block, let’s start with the good news. This way you might like me enough to not throw me out when you hear the bad news.

The good news in this reading is that **Jesus calls us to live in a way that is pleasing to God by choosing God over wealth**. This lifestyle was always meant to be because it is the lifestyle of the kingdom of God. Throughout Luke we see Jesus introducing a way of life that involves so many aspects that are in contrast to the earthly and spiritual empires surrounding him. His call to a whole new way of life shakes the foundations of the way people are living.

What are some of the characteristics of the **Divine Economy** that Jesus calls us to?

1. GENEROSITY: “For you know the generous acts of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”

Just as God is generous and has shown his overflowing generosity and mercy to us, we should imitate him and also overflow with generosity and mercy towards one another. This generosity leads to a lifestyle of sharing resources (not just money) and even lending without the slavery of interest or the pressure of paying back.

1. EVERYONE HAS ENOUGH: Imitating Christ compels us to live in the flow of the divine economy in which there is universal sufficiency where everyone has enough. No hoarding is necessary because there is enough for everyone. It doesn’t mean everyone has an equal amount of resources, but it means that everyone has enough.
2. JOYFUL, SACRIFICIAL GIVING: The divine economy is marked by the spirit of joyful, sacrificial giving and giving is considered a privilege. There is a special love and care for the poor and needy. Because we live in abundance and trust, we can give from our substance and not just from our excess. This was demonstrated by Jesus. “In Christ’s becoming poor, he does not lose in richness but out of his inexhaustible supply of divine richness, gives of himself without suffering depletion or loss.”(Andemicael)

DRIVING FORCE: COMPASSION: The driving force behind the Divine Economy is compassion and love, not profit. We are called to participate in a flow of compassion that stems from God. This leads to peace and joy in people because everyone is provided for.

This is good news because living in this way is beautiful, full of love and dignity. It is the way of the Kingdom of God. It is a comprehensive lifestyle of which money and the financial economy are just a part. Jesus invites us to embrace a way of life that is different from the cruel economy we are surrounded by.

**BAD NEWS**

And now for the bad news…

Most of us are infiltrated by the spirit of wealth or mammon of the world that surrounds us. Let’s call it the “Undivine Economy.” FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD, IT IS A VERY HARD and even DANGEROUS THING TO BE WEALTHY. THE TRUTH IS: MOST OF US IN THIS CONGREGATION ARE WEALTHY even if you don’t feel like it.

To even consider if we are wealthy, let’s consider who is NOT wealthy? According to the Brookings Institute’s Global Poverty Report, 8% of the world’s population (600 millions) live in extreme poverty. World Vision reports that 736 million live in extreme poverty and that 1.3 billion people in 104 countries live in multidimensional poverty.

According to a report from Deutsche Welle, 20% of the German population are threatened by poverty in spite of historic low unemployment. A European Union study cited by Germany’s Federal Statistic’s Office says that one in five Germans is threatened by poverty.

Most of us are definitely wealthy when compared to these.

**SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE UNDIVINE ECONOMY**

1. FEAR AND WORRY: So many people I know worry about money incessantly and there never seems to be enough for now or later. It affects their ability to be a cheerful and generous giver. This fear and worry is what keeps some churches down. I know churches that constantly struggle to make their budget and spend an inordinate amount of time in fundraising activities when the truth is – if everyone would at least tithe, the budget would be met and there would be more to use for activities that matter.

Question: How much do worry about money? How much of your time is spent daily thinking and fretting about your financial situation? If you didn’t have to worry so much, would you give more?

1. HOARDING: The fear of the future leads many to hoard, often in the name of being responsible. We see in the parable of the rich man who decided to build bigger barns that God did not honor this lifestyle at all. This hoarding leads us to become numb to those like Lazarus who are suffering right in front of us while we are living well. Our OT reading in Amos this morning showed us how offensive it is to the Lord when we neglect and even abuse the needy and poor.

Question: How much are you used to sharing? What percentage of your income do you share with others? Do you share out of your excess or also out of your substance? Does your commitment to hoarding prevent you from responding in joy and generosity to the needs around you?

1. A CONSTANT QUEST FOR PROFIT AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS: This economy is driven by intemperance and is based on an assumption of unlimited growth and unlimited accumulation. This becomes a system in which some exceed their bounds and “flourish” at the expense of both the earth and other people. (SBS)
2. UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH AND POWER: On a macro level, dominant civilizations drive resources and wealth into greater concentration of idolatrous power. This is not just a modern western problem. It was the case with Egypt during the time of Jesus. It can be seen in many countries around the world. A PEW survey calls this inequality one of the greatest threats to the world. In a Bloomberg Business Report, economists warn that this inequality is polarizing society and stoking discontent.

Question: Where do you see the unequal distribution of wealth and power in your home country? Where do we see it in our own lives where we have more than others?

DRIVING FORCE: The driving forces of this Undivine Economy are blind self-love, self-regard, accumulation of wealth, self preservation, and profit without regard to the condition of the other. This can be seen on an individual level as well as a corporate level.

My brothers and sisters, here is the last piece of bad news today, though it may end up as good news for some.

YOU MUST CHOOSE and WE AS A CHURCH MUST CHOOSE. Our gospel reading today says that you cannot serve God and wealth. You cannot experience the joy and abundance of living in the Divine Economy while clinging to the Undivine Economy.

**INVITATION**

Let us choose today to seek the Kingdom of God as it relates to the Divine Economy. And let us endeavor to make the necessary adjustments so we can live in God’s economy, both as individuals and as a congregation.

**Grant Us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen!**