

This morning's lesson from the gospel of Mark is both well known and quite challenging! (Jesus telling the rich young man to sell ("everything you have") and give to the poor, and stating how hard it is "for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.") As with many parts of the Bible it can be problematic to take his words absolutely literally. "Sell *all* we have," as one translations says... really??? Did Jesus not know about the need for a house and furniture other household items? Maybe not... we recall that he said about himself: "the Son of Man has no place to lay his head!" (And yet he did also mention how wise it is to build your house on a rock!) Maybe Jesus was a "couch- surfer"... always traveling, always staying at houses of friends or hospitable people, "taking no money for his journey" which he advised his followers. Take that literally also? Maybe he was like the Buddhist monks who take only one bowl for their journey, so that they live *by grace* from all that they meet.

Well, Jesus does talk about money as much or more than any other topic, so we do well to ponder his teachings. One of the most famous teaching is when he says "You cannot serve both God and mammon (money)," for one becomes the master... one takes precedence. Jesus means that it should be God who has our foremost priority and loyalty. If money and the making of money becomes our primary focus, the ways of God to help the poor and oppressed often get ignored, and greed tempts us. The opening of Jesus' sermon on the mount is "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew) or "Blessed are the poor." (Luke). In Luke 4, Jesus says his mission is to set at liberty the oppressed and bring good news *to the poor*. Basically, Jesus is always warning the rich, yes all of us, about being overly attached to our possessions. The saying is true that there are no U-hauls used between here and our next world; Jesus would have resonated with what our Buddhist friends call an attitude of "detachment."

This weekend, I can't help but think of Native Americans, and Imagine Studios has done an amazing job at creating a day-long event

and getting out the word. Tomorrow, starting at 10, I hope to hear some of the presentations and speeches by Native Americans down on the waterfront. (10:00 Larry Spotted Crow Mann, opening speech, 10:45 Hawk Henries, wooden flute concert, 12:00 Lonecry Drummers, 2:15, Dugout canoe presentation). We hear about injustices we inflicted on indigenous peoples everywhere, which naturally becomes also form of *economic* injustice. Yes, it is a sad history, but like the history of blacks in this country, it is indeed part of *American* history that often got overlooked or forgotten. In my childhood history and TV depictions, I heard mostly about wars with scalping, or smoking peace pipes, or the Native Americans teaching Europeans how to grow crops, survive the winters, then share happy Thanksgiving meals. There are many stories of ruthless colonization that we never heard! And the *economics* of it ... is that any group of people that was systematically oppressed, will pass along their disadvantage to the next generation. We learn about the children of Native Americans who were taken from their homes and sent to boarding schools that did not allow them to speak their language, nor to practice their culture. It was killing their culture, killing their spirit, actually killing *them*.

If we took Jesus' words literally, we would be selling off land and houses and giving to the poor, especially to Native Americans from whom we took the land. We would be finding ways to give back to the Massachusett tribe, the Pentucket tribe, or the Pennacook tribe along the Merrimack River. When I was younger, I did not think much about "Indians" living on "reservations"... I did not learn about how they were forced on marches, like the Cherokee nation forced onto a "Trail of Tears." I did not think much about how they are supposed to interact economically with the society that conquered them. I did not know about all the alcoholism on those reservations, due to despair and lack of freedom. And are the casinos the best gift and economic opportunity we give them? Sure they make a lot of money, but can the work really

be satisfying, if it is the best opportunity you realistically have ... if you know that many gamblers suffer deeply in the chains of that addiction?

I turn to Rev. Jim Wallis in his recent book, *The False White Gospel*, to his chapter called Jesus' final test of discipleship, that "last judgment" at the end of Matthew. You know verses also called the "parable of the sheep and the goats," Matthew Chapter 25. Referring to the sick, the naked, the imprisoned, Jesus says: Even when you did or did not do it "to the *least of these*," you did or did not do it unto me!" In other words: How we treat the poor is how we treat Jesus himself.

Wallis believes that White Christian Nationalism has failed Jesus' final test of discipleship, almost never speaking about the poor, about economic injustices and inequities. He asks, "When was the last time you heard a Christian Nationalist pastor preach about justice for the poor, for immigrants, for groups in society that are discriminated against? (Such preachers usually use words like justice or righteousness to refer only to personal piety, God punishing or saving *individuals*). Apparently one TV personality (Glenn Beck) urged people to leave churches that mention social justice. He said if you see or hear the words "social justice," run as fast as you can! But, Mr. Beck, the Bible is full of teachings about wealth and poverty. The Hebrew prophets were all about "letting justice roll down" (Amos 6:21). Or as the prophet Isaiah puts it: "Is this not the fast that I choose, to let the oppressed go free, to bring the homeless poor into your house to break every yoke?" (Isaiah 58). So many Psalms tell of God uplifting the poor... And this saying from Proverbs: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends *to the Lord*" (Pvb 19:17). Sounds just like Jesus in Matthew 25, "When you did it to the least of these, you did it *unto me!*" Jesus says that those who welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the prisoners etc. are his true followers.

We are clear that Jesus never said that money and wealth was evil. He just said it was "harder" for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God. Why? Because it is hard for us to give up our possessions, and to share

our wealth. The apostle Paul clarifies this when he says that it is the “love of money” that is the problem. If having money tempts us to be greedy, to just keep more and more, that is going against Jesus’ teachings. In his parable about the “rich fool,” we remember he challenged the man about building more and more storehouses for grain, stockpiling wealth, reminding him that he could die at any time. He may have had earthly treasure for himself, while not being “rich toward God.”

As we think this weekend about Columbus Day or Indigenous People’s Day, I remind you of Ken Medema’s great song about the disparities and injustices in America. We can work to create more freedom, even economic freedom, for all!

I SEE AMERICA, by Ken Medema, 1975

Chorus: *I see America through the eyes of love, and long for all her people to be free. And if you see, put your hand to the job; There is work that must be done, til freedom’s song is sung from sea to shining sea.*

*1. I have seen the white sand beaches near the town where I was born, I have seen the springtime, forest, fresh and green. I have walked along the highways, by the fields of standing corn, I have breathed the mountain air, so fresh and clean. And I have seen in other places where it’s hard to breathe the air, and the high-rise holocaust blocks the morning sun. And children play in the dirty streets, and no one seems to care. America's children, look what we have done! **Chorus***

*2. I have seen the dauntless Pilgrims, who came from foreign shores and braved the raging peril of the sea. I have seen them suffer hardship and risk their lives in war in order that a people may be free. But I've seen how first Americans were driven from their land, and I've seen the slave ships come from far away. And tyranny is still alive, there’s hate on every hand. Yes, we must work to end oppression’s day! **Chorus***