

What do we have?

Our reading this morning comes from the gospel of Luke.

We are talking this week – again – about giving – about how we grow in our generosity – toward God and others. We are thinking again this week about how we respond in our giving – as disciples of Jesus Christ – to:

God's creative act – forming in beauty, in wonder, in mystery – the heavens and the earth, the universes that stretch far beyond our imagination, the smallest of living organisms and the greatest of creatures that fill the seas – and of course us – you and me.

God's provision – providing in an extraordinarily generous way – the air that we breath – the food we eat – the weather that makes this planet habitable – our ability to solve problems – to work – to provide for ourselves and our families that which is necessary for life and living.

God's redeeming work – Jesus – calling us to life – life that is good and life that is meaningful – life that is the way that God intended it when he created it and called it good. God's redeeming work in Jesus who showed us how to be human – kind and compassionate – sharing not self-ish – in relationship with both God and others. God's redeeming work in Jesus who demonstrates God's love for us – offering the forgiveness that sets us free to live anew – extending the grace that

allows us to be God's new creation – giving himself so that we might have a life that is eternal.

How do you respond to that?

It is what we have been talking about. And we have talked about understanding how God's generosity toward us – in creation – in provision – and in redemption – is the example for us in generous giving. We were reminded – as people created in the image of God that we were created to be generous.

We allowed ourselves to touch upon our own need – to experience the living God for ourselves – and our need to help others to experience that same living God. We looked at what we needed financially as Echo Hill to be able to provide for that experience – that encounter – for ourselves and for others.

We get it! Don't we? – We understand why it is we should and would give. But what do we give. When we think about this question the place for us to start is 'what do we have to give'.

As a wise pastor once told me, "Bill you can't give what you don't have."

Today Jesus is in Jerusalem. He has gone there to celebrate the Passover with his disciples – and to give his life – his whole life – sacrificially – so that you and I would have life – life now and life that is eternal.

He is teaching in the temple. He has just finished telling those that were listening that they should 'Beware of the scribes – for they like to walk around showing off their piety – their rightness with God – they like to sit in the best seats – seats where they can be seen – whether at church or at parties. They also will insist that even a poor widow give her due to the church – even if she doesn't have it to give.

When Jesus finishes talking – he looks up and he sees people putting their gifts – their offerings into the temple treasury.

Prayer

Reading

Where did you learn about money – about 'handling' money (Whatever that means?) – about taking care of the business of keeping the bills paid, a roof over your head, food on the table?

- Consumer Math Class – Accounting Class?
- Life Sciences Class? A Consumer Credit Class?
- From Dave Ramsey's Radio 'Money Minute'?
- Parents?
- Trial and Error – making the mistakes of spending too much on a credit card and then having to work for years to pay it off. Spending too much on Christmas gifts and then not having enough to pay the electric bill or the rent.
- Never learned – still learning.

Jesus feels that understanding ‘money’ – both our financial and physical resources – is important – and he is not afraid to talk about it. In fact Luke’s gospel – more than any of the gospels – shares with us Jesus’ teachings about money – wealth.

With a bit of hesitancy – I am going to try to summarize Jesus’ teaching on money.

- Wealth and poverty are not good or bad – one is not a sign of God’s blessing or God’s curse – they simply are what they are. But either can cause one’s heart to be turned away from God.
 - o For the rich – ‘you cannot serve God and mammon – wealth’. ‘Where your treasure is – there too is your heart’. Wealth becomes an idol – false god – to be served.
 - o For the poor – a turning away – wondering if God cares for you and your plight.

- God’s heart – the heart of a parent that wants the best for their children – is for both those who have great wealth – and those who are poor.

- For those who are poor – Jesus’ teaches that it is the responsibility of wealthy to care for them. This responsibility entails not only providing food, shelter, and clothing, but opportunity for them to prosper in their own right. The wealthy will be held accountable for the use of what they have.

Jesus teaching on money and the physical resources that we possess is that those resources can never replace the relationship – that we are to have – as disciples – with God – and with our neighbor – especially our neighbor in need.

We are talking about giving. And in our reading from Luke this morning we hear the story of the poor widow giving all she has – in spite of her poverty – even though it will mean an uncertain today – and uncertain tomorrow – for her. What does she have to give? We don't know exactly – but Luke has told us that she is poor and she is a widow which means something – and Jesus has told us that she has given all she had to live on.

Is Jesus praising her for generosity?

The others who are giving – Luke has told us – are 'rich' and that they are putting their gifts into the treasury. Luke gives us no indication of the size of those gifts –whether they are generous or not – but we can infer that they are not by any means putting 'all they have to live on' into the offering plate.

Is this story meant to be an admonishment for those of us who are rich – those of us who give generously – writing out our hefty checks – throwing in our 20s, 50s, and 100s – but really not having a thing of value on the line?

How are we to take this passage? How are we to apply it to our own lives?

R. Allen Culpepper (NIBC Luke p 395-396) states in his commentary on this passage;

“This brief scene exposes for self-examination the private side of all our acts of religious devotion. Why do we do what we do for others and for God?”

Which is a good question to ask – why do we do what we do – whether we are talking about worship, or prayer, or those acts of compassion and service we offer, or the ways we use our talents – our natural giftedness – or whether we are talking about our financial giving to the church or agencies or to individuals – it is a good question to ask.

Is this about us – us looking good – or feeling good – or is this about God – saying thanks to God – giving in response to God’s hearts for the other – the other who is ‘poor’ – poor as in not having what they need to make it – or – poor as in the poor spiritually.

The other question that might be important for us to ask – is what do we have? I would say that almost all of us here are wealthy. In comparison to those who live in some third world countries where food is scarce and the ability often to afford it even scarcer. We are wealthy.

We are wealthy in terms of money and finances – we have a wealth of opportunities – and we are wealthy in terms of time – we have more leisure time than those generations that came before us and had to grow much of their own food stuff – and we are better trained – more educated.

We are wealthy – this is not meant to condemn us – it is not meant to guilt us – it is to speak truth. And knowing the truth – it means that we must pay heed to Jesus’ concern for those who

are wealthy. We must be on guard that our wealth – does not take the place of God in our lives
(Do we trust in God? The American Economic Engine? Ourselves?)

Does how we ‘give’ demonstrate that we trust in God – the kind of trust that goes beyond belief
and causes us to act – the kind of trust that is as much a matter of the heart as the mind?

We are wealthy – and we must confront the questions of why we give – and what we give – in
light of what we have. For where our treasure is – there too is our heart.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus is concerned for both the rich and the poor. – He is concerned for the scribe and the poor
widow. - He is concerned that the poor will have what they need – physically – a home to
provide shelter – food for the table – the care and compassion – understanding for their
neighbors.

He concerned that the rich will have what they need spiritually – a honest and trusting relationship with God – on that is not built on some misguided thinking that their riches come from God's blessing the rightness of their living. – A relationship that is based not on what they have or what they can give – but that is built on their love of God – and their faith that the God who created them will provide for them – today – and tomorrow – and always.

So regardless of where we find ourselves today – in with the rich – or in with the poor – I want you to know – that God is concerned for you – for your physical well being – but – also for your spiritual well being. – As disciples we are called to care for the poor by using our riches. (Don't you just wish God would leave you alone and worry about someone else for a bit? ☺)