September 21, 2025

Luke 16: 1-13

Pray

The rich get richer

The labor of the poor is exploited

Taxes proportionally higher for those with low income than the wealthiest who pay little to none.

A person’s value is too often seen in their economic contribution rather than a God given gift to all.

I am talking of course about the socioeconomic reality of ancient Israel. The Roman Empire squeezed its colonies for resources through taxation. If you couldn’t pay you lost your land. So, the wealthy bought up the available land literally dirt cheap and now would rent it back to you for a fee. The Ancient worlds version of share cropping. But these rich elite aren’t going to live near the fields, not in the rural country side, no, no, no they do not want to live out in the sticks. They wanted the benefits of living in and around Jerusalem in southern Israel so they used middle men, or stewards to go North and collect their fees in the form of wine, wheat, or olive oil. The system kept the poor poor and the rich rich. But of course, I am just talking ancient history. Right?

This is the historical context of today’s strange parable…

Now the setting within the Gospel is equally important to know when considering todays odd teaching. Religious leaders, Pharisees are big time mad at Jesus for hanging out with the wrong crowd. He hangs out with tax collectors, sinners, and eats with them. In response to their anger Jesus tells not 6/7 parables, but five. The first three you might be familiar with. Lost Sheep, Shepherd leaves the 99 to find the one. Lost Coin, women has 10 coin loses one searches high and low, finds it and throws a party. Lost Son, or prodigal son, Kid asks for inheritance before his dad dies, spends it all, and is welcomed back. God in Christ seeks the lost, a beautiful message. Popular parables but they are immediately followed by today’s teaching. This mornings story can could also be read in response to the angry religious leaders.

Hear it again … Those in power grumbled that Jesus wasn’t following their religious rules so Jesus told his closest friends a story. There was a billionaire who was mad his money manager wasn’t squeezing even more pennies out of the poor share croppers. So he called him up and said, “Your fired.” The money manager now realized he was out of a job, with no money, no skills needed in the current job market, and no friends. With limited time before word got out he quickly called up those that owed his former employer money and slashed their debts. He was making new allies, building up favors to be cashed in later. The master commends the dishonest but clever fraud. Jesus then invites those listening to do likewise? What we are meant to emulate can seem unclear but Jesus ends this section by making it plain. You cannot serve God and Wealth.

Remembering that this is in response to those who are made about who is hanging out with Jesus invites them and us to reflect on how we under value people and over value wealth. *I wonder if we don’t make stained glass windows out of this parable because we just might also feel convicted…*

We participate in a system just as broken as the ancient world. *When we buy products with no concern for the labor of those who made them. When we judge the purchases of those on Food Stamps or SNAP benefits and give no judgement for the social handouts Elon Musk’s and Jeff Bezos receive. When we choose our own wants over helping the critical needs of our neighbors.*

The role of money in our lives and world is messy, complicated, and we just might feel powerless to really make a difference. However, maybe Jesus is inviting us to make a new start. Perhaps we serve God by carefully selecting the coffee we serve after church.

The coffee industry faces significant challenges from environmental issues to low wages and child labor. But the Lutheran Churches are trying to make a difference. With the motto “Brew Good. Do Good.” The theme of Lutheran World Relief’s Farmers Market where we have the goal of empowering farmers and enriching lives. Let’s learn a little bit more…

Coffee Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5XB9alkMoo>

Lutheran World Relief helped empower Gustavo to cut out the middle man and reach consumers directly. In addition to helping with equipment and sharing knowledge. To me this is using money shrewdly. An example that to us might seem small in the grand scheme of the world’s problems, but one that demonstrates what is possible when we serve God instead of money. Again it might seem small to us but I bet if we were to ask Gustavo or his kids and grandkids he wouldn’t think it was small at all. This morning you are invited not just to receive grace through communion but after worship we have a pot of Lutheran World Relief coffee a small way to support farmers like Gustavo. Together we seek to share love in transformative ways because we have first received this love that transforms.

We give thanks that Jesus did not come to serve money, power, or even himself, but he came to seek, serve, and save the lost because Jesus values you and all people. On the cross he demonstrated what love values and through his resurrection showed us divine loves true power setting us free to respond, to serve, to brew good and do good. Thanks be to God. Amen.