

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Amos 6:1a, 4-7; Psalm 146; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Saint Luke 16:19-31

In nomine Jesu!

How shall we respond to today's biblical texts about the intentional indifference to human suffering of leaders "at ease in Zion...who sing idle songs;" and about "the temptation of comfort, the love of money," and Jesus' parable about a comfortable, callous, and cruel child of God feasting while a poor, starving child of God lay dying at his doorstep. How shall we respond to these biblical texts at this juncture of our history now?

In his parable, even Jesus appears skeptical about how we hearers might respond, even to him! "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

Over the centuries, the Church has found several ways to avoid having God's people confront these readings. For more than half of the Church's history, we simply avoided all "Old Testament" texts, like today's from Amos. In the first half of the Twentieth Century, most Lutherans and Episcopalians appointed Hebrew Bible texts, but their use was optional. It was not until the introduction of our three-year lectionary in the mid-1960s that we were formally exposed to these readings. Of course, this only applies to churches that require the regular use of a lectionary. Most non-denominational and "evangelical" churches do not have such a requirement; and as a result, these texts are seldom read, studied, or heard. And, as former evangelical pastor and author Tim Alberta observed in his 2023 book *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism* (New York: Harper), when one of these pastors does choose the kind of biblical texts that confront us today, they are

often confronted with this response: "Where did you get those liberal talking points?" "I'm literally quoting Jesus Christ," the startled pastor replies. "Yes, but that doesn't work anymore. That's weak."

What about us? How shall we, who are confronted by these kinds of biblical texts regularly and often, respond?

Allow me to state the obvious: "Someone *has been raised* from the dead, and that Someone - our crucified, risen, and ascended Savior Jesus Christ - is speaking to us. Furthermore, at the font, the table, and the Word we are regularly filled by the Spirit to trust, and act on Jesus' words as being true and as working in, for, and through us. Even now.

As we ponder these texts, it's vitally important that we remember that nowhere in this or any other parable does Jesus impute guilt, induce fear, or invite shame. The rich foodie in Jesus' parable is not punished simply because he's rich, but because he's self-absorbed, deliberately indifferent to suffering, and greedy. No one hearing these words today should leave here guilty, shameful, or fearful unless "self-absorbed, deliberately indifferent and greedy" applies to you. Then we should talk. Guilt, shame, and fear are not the way God in Christ motivates behavior.

Also notice that the writer of Second Timothy does not use such negative reinforcement either. That writer simply warns about the "uncertainty of riches" contrasted with trust in the God who "richly provides." That writer reminds us to use our resources for the good of others not to avoid Hades, but so that we "take hold of life that really is life" and ease the life of those who on account of injustice aren't able to even imagine what "life that really is life" actually is.

There is one more dimension in today's readings that we must not leave unremarked or unnoticed. While both Jesus and the writer of Second Timothy focus on individual lives, Amos calls us to address our communal life as a nation, society, and people. Prophesying around 750BCE, about the same time as Hosea and the first Isaiah, Amos speaks to folks like us who are the leaders of their society. Amos reminds the well-to-do in Judah and Israel that, while they as individuals may live faithful, just, and charitable lives, they also have a vocation – a calling – a responsibility to bend their society and pressure those who lead their society to make their society - their government - faithful, just, and charitable too. Amos reminds us that God is outraged by callous societal indifference and promises his hearers that if they can't persuade their leaders toward justice, God will. Which is bad news for those going into exile, but good news for those they leave behind.

Today One who has risen from the dead stands among us, presents us with these readings, and breathes the Spirit into us, not to guilt or shame us, but to trigger our individual and communal response; a response of faith active in unconditional, all-embracing love. Amen.

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