

The God/Wealth Debate

Rev. Ken Gray Church of the Advent, Colwood BC Sept 19/2010

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of such a busy season of adjustment, and starting up, and for some, travel, and for others, change, even disruptions, let's spend some time with the theme of **Sabbath**:

SABBATH (Notes from Ched Myers)

We Christians regard the Sabbath at best as one of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:8- 11), at worst as a quaint Jewish custom. But this injunction is instituted even before the Covenant at Sinai, and it is reiterated again, as a life and death issue. Sabbath is the “beginning and end of Torah.”

Why? Because Sabbath is much more than a prescribed periodic rest for the land and for human labor. **It is the bedrock of a culture of constraint.** Its prohibitions function to disrupt our compulsive attempts to "control" nature, and our addictive need to “maximize” the forces of production and consumption. **“Sabbath observance requires a leap of faith,** a firm confidence that the world will continue to operate benevolently for a day without human labor.”

Sabbath is, in other words, fundamentally an ethos of self-limitation, something our modern culture is unable and unwilling to do. It isn't hard to see how crucial such old wisdom is to our current struggle to change an economic story that is truly killing us and our world.

WITH THIS IN MIND, AND IN STARK OPPOSITION TO THESE SENTIMENTS – Gospel according to Luke 16:1-13

TEXT

Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was

squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, “What is this that I hear about you? **Give me an account of your management**, because you cannot be my manager any longer.”

Then the manager said to himself, “What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.”

HOW TO CHARACTERIZE THIS STORY

1. everyone for themselves
2. lack of trust, culture of suspicion
3. status is everything
4. a very awkward bible story in a pivotal position in Jesus’ teaching about money, power and love

JESUS AND THE SABBATH TRADITIONS (again, Ched Myers)

It is this old cosmology of Sabbath Economics that Jesus of Nazareth sought to rehabilitate under the shadow of a different empire—and that is our task as well. The memory of the manna is shown in his wilderness feedings of the poor, and told as the central petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Give us today enough bread.”

The Sabbath Economics **principle of the remainder**—in which the edges of every field and the gleanings of every harvest belong by rights (not by charity) to the poor and the undomesticated animals—is embodied in Jesus’ authorization of his disciples to strip grain from a field.

1. God provides, and that is enough, for all (even in an over-populated world)
2. Sharing is an essential, not optional human economic practice
3. In the distribution of the remainder, justice is accomplished

4. Truthful spirituality is practical spirituality (for the hungry to hear, they must first be fed)

OUR PART IN THE STORY

(Journalist William Greider) ... The economic story into which we've been socialized, and around which our culture is organized, is deeply flawed. We need a new narrative ... WHY ... the proportional numbers speak loudly

GLOBAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS

1. An analysis of long-term trends shows the distance between the richest and poorest countries was about :
 - 3 to 1 in 1820
 - 11 to 1 in 1913
 - 35 to 1 in 1950
 - 44 to 1 in 1973
 - 72 to 1 in 1992UNDP
2. In 1976, the wealthiest 1% of Americans owned 19% of all private material wealth in the US. Today, they own over 40% of all wealth. Their share now exceeds the wealth owned by the bottom 92% of the US population.
3. SUCH GROSS INBALANCES leads to violence, poverty, poor health, radicalism and racism, famine and malnutrition etc.

THE CHURCHES

(To paraphrase Jesuit John Haughey) **our churches have for too long read the gospel as if there we didn't participate in an economy, and we have participated in the economy as if there were no gospel.**

TEXT KERNEL 1

'Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then

you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?

1. not a clear text at all
2. gospel values embodied in unlikely characters
3. the point is not rigid conformity to a code but actual beneficial ethical compassion

TEXT KERNEL 2

No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other.
You cannot serve God and wealth.'

WORD-PAIR OPTIONS

1. **God AND wealth** – rejected by the text
2. **God OR wealth** – the usual choice (a Black and White solution)
3. **God WITHIN wealth** – God usually gets lost (wealth too alluring)
4. **God IS wealth** – a way forward (where your treasure is ...)