

Bishop Smith's reflections—September 6, 2016



God and Money

After 29 years in the parish, I know what it's like to preach during the fall of the year and to have people complain, "If I hear one more sermon about money....!" Or, "All the church cares about is the almighty dollar." I've even heard people say, "Well, of course he wants us to give more money. It's budget time and he wants a salary raise!" Yes, I'll admit that in most congregations, fall of the year is both stewardship drive and budget time, but how many parishioners realize that the pre-assigned lectionary texts in September and October each year are chock full of Jesus' sayings about money? How many know that of all the sayings of Jesus, "kingdom of God"

is the most recurring topic, but money is firmly in second place? There's no way around it. Jesus talks a lot about money. If you have a problem with preaching about money, complain to Jesus and not your pastor. She's just trying to be faithful to the scriptures.

In Luke 16 Jesus says, "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." Jesus would never have needed to share this insight had we embraced the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me." Chief among those earthly things competing for God's proper place as number one in our lives is the mesmerizing allure of material wealth. Our calling in Christ is to serve God by serving our neighbor.

Money has no intrinsic value. It's only as good as that for which we can exchange it. If Christian calling is servanthood, then money is merely servanthood in storage. Our discernment as faithful followers of Christ is how best to manage the physical resources entrusted to us. How might we best release and exchange our money in ways that will serve the Gospel of Christ? Jesus reminds us in Luke that we can and must manage our wealth, but we must neither love it nor serve it.

The early church's first and most basic creedal proclamation was simply "Jesus is Lord." We still believe that Jesus is in charge and that we are called to follow Jesus. Even so, we persist in fragmenting our lives into various "pieces of the pie." We have our vocational life, our citizenship life, our family life, our social life, our financial life, and, yes, our faith and religious life. C. S. Lewis reminded us of the great deception of this way of thinking. He noted, "Every inch of the cosmos is claimed by God and simultaneously counter-claimed by Satan." There is no secular world. If "you shall have no other gods" and "you cannot serve God and wealth," then the whole pie IS God! The decisions we make vocationally, patriotically, relationally, socially, financially, and anything else are all included in how we choose to serve God in Christ. Nothing is exempt. Nothing is off the table, including money.

Happy faithful management to you!

Walking with you,

Bishop Timothy Smith



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