

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

November 10, 2024



POVERTY

is a death sentence

by Drew Downs

For most of human history, extreme poverty is a death sentence. This isn't rhetorical, it's real. In many parts of the world today, being without any money or support will mean you have, at best, a week to live.

This is the undergirding understanding of Jesus's feeding ministry, when he feeds the multitudes, not because he thinks they're getting hangry or will leave the movement. But that they are on the brink of death.

It is also at the root of his language in prayer and parable of receiving our *daily bread* or a *daily wage*—for we are to be saved daily by God from certain death. And by our neighbors through their generosity.

Any vision which demonizes the poor is sin. This includes those who make poverty essential for the modern economic system. This is a vision so cruel and unconscionable our scripture likens it to murder.

ORDINARY TIME

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Jesus for President

I'm writing to you before Election Day in the United States, and as the people anticipate its outcome, we are reminded to look past a president for our leadership.

Shane Claiborne recast the traditional political statement for us in a book of the same name: *Jesus for President*. That we, as followers of Jesus, declare Jesus is Lord, which is to say, our chief, leader, and liberator. He is the one we listen to.

This, of course, is not to suggest that the person holding the highest office in the country doesn't matter, or that we are to abstain from making a morally-convicted decision. But it is to say that which ever person holds the job, they aren't God. And all of our hopes should never rest in them.

On the other side of the coin, our conviction in the risen Christ empowers us to work for the Kin-dom, through service, love, and generous giving. We are called into partnership of world-changing proportions, of the public transformation of unjust systems, of growing welcome of the outcast, the immigrant, and the refugee, and the healing of wounded, forgotten, and abused.

Our true president calls us to serve our community in sacrificial love, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, heal the sick, and visit the incarcerated as how we meet Jesus on the road we're walking. Because our first citizenship is to the Kin-dom of God. And our command is to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. This is the hanger from which our entire way of life is dependent for support.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 27B

November 10, 2024

Collect

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Mark 12:38-44

As Jesus taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

ORDINARY TIME

Reflection

After the confrontations with religious leaders, after pushing the crowd to reimagine the Messianic tradition as inviting another David, Jesus warns the public of the scribes: of their intentions, of their behavior, of their loyalties.

His warning: that they oppress the weak through the power of the purse is both morally and economically unjust. It is a matter of bad theology and behavior. In short—this isn't just about what they *think* and *believe*—it is also what they do.

Jesus warns the people because this isn't patently obvious. The supposedly-righteous clothe themselves in the appearance of righteousness while they starve the weak and powerless. Economic exploitation is Jesus's number one pet peeve and these people have it down to a science.

Then Jesus sits down and watches a woman approach the Temple deposit box. He calls his disciples close, inviting them to see the visual metaphor of what he was just saying. This poor widow gives her last two coins to the Temple. And he calls that an infinitely greater act of faith than the wealthy folk in front of her giving from their largesse.

It is easy to forget this as a matter of both thinking and acting—that morality is both a matter of belief and behavior as we go about our business of living—believing and doing things. But Jesus isn't seeking to shame the wealthy here. Nor is he *only* seeking to glorify the generosity of the widow. He wants to point out that, without a penny, this woman will be dead in four days and the powerful don't care. Economics, they'll say. Just the way it is, they'll say.

Exploitation Jesus is saying. Sin he is saying.

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