



Bringing what matters back to the gospel for justice, liberation, and delight.

“Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor..”



Liturgy that matters

- October 14, 2018 -

TEXTS

Job 23:1-9, 16-17 or Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Psalm 22:1-15 or Psalm 90:12-17

Hebrews 4:12-16

Mark 10:17-31

What links the texts this week?

This world can be such a hard place. We struggle to live, we face hardship at the hands of our neighbors, we harm those we love, and we are complicit in evil that makes us feel powerless. Whether we are under the hand of oppression or profiting off the labor of God's children, the Kingdom of God has a liberating Word for us. God, the One who is Just, the One who sets free, offers us an alternative way of life together - one that trades corruption for cooperation, power-over for power-together. God will deliver us from the hands of evil.

ORDER OF WORSHIP [\(click here for a text version of liturgy\)](#)

Call to worship

Come and worship! The Spirit of the Living God calls us to gather.

Together, we will become seekers of justice.

Imagine, God making the impossible possible through us.

Together, we can en flesh the dreams of God.

A world without hunger, without poverty, without exploitation.

Together, we can give up that which destroys and choose that which sets free.

Let us worship the One who transforms the world.

Opening Prayer

God of justice, will you draw near? Whether we struggle to pay our bills, to feed our children, to find work that sustains, or to live ethically in this complicated world, you promise us there is Good News for us. Set us free from stories and systems that destroy and set us on a path towards one another. Give us hearts that are gracious and fill us with zeal for justice until together, we birth a new world free of exploitation of labor, of bodies, of the land, and of the life you intend for us. Amen.

Invitation to offering

Jesus calls us not to simply give a portion of what we have but to choose an entirely different way of relating with each other where what belongs to one belongs to all. With hope and trust that God can shape us into a community of radical love, justice, and hospitality, let us bring our offerings to God and one another.

Prayer of dedication

Holy One, may your hand of justice sweep over your church, this country, and every family, drawing us away from that which corrupts and towards a new world where resources are shared, reparations are made, and all life is able to thrive. Through these gifts and the offerings of our lives in service to you, may it be so. Amen.

Benediction

Jesus calls us to leave every commitment we have to security and follow the way of justice in community. How hard it is to enter the Kingdom, but with God all things are made possible. In the company of the One who binds our lives together, go in peace.



SERMON PREP

Text: Mark 10:17-31

Questions:

- How would you describe God's economy? What would that look like in today's world?
- What are the implications if the story is interpreted as the modern day American church being the rich man?
- What systems of exploitation are hardest for you to imagine changing your relationship to? What would fill you with the same kind of grief this man feels when Jesus asks him to move away from benefiting off the struggle of others?

Application

- Cosmic application - Though most moderate and liberal leaning Christians would be quick to address the limitations and problems of the prosperity gospel approach to God - one that suggests God's ultimate will is for us to be individually happy and that the only thing that stands in the way of health, wealth, and pleasure is faith and effort - we would do well to linger in this text's challenge of our own economic theologies. Jesus is clear about a few things in the text: wealth is not a sign of divine blessing, the Kingdom is not inherited like

property, and we cannot live into the goodness of God's way while benefiting from economic exploitation. These are all strong counters to a God of the prosperity gospel - often characterized by invitations to make a donation to wealthy pastors who will then pray for (and guarantee) monetary riches for the individual. This may sound absurd in its extremism, but how different, really, are the cultural/theological norms we are swimming in - even within liberal church life? We may not believe God hands out wealth as blessings, but we sure find it easy to question someone's life choices when they ask for dollar on the street as if it is an obvious and clear indication of their moral choices. Any creeping suspicion of their character rather than the set of economic realities that lead vulnerable people into poverty is an indictment on one's own wealth and privilege and theology. Cultural narratives lead us to a similar thinking in so many ways and arenas - even often gauging the "success" of a church (or ministry) by its income/size as if that indicates God's blessing of it or not. Consider using this text to address the lingering confusion between God's will, God's blessing, and the systems that make up our economy. You may want to draw on the narratives of capitalism that are embedded deeply in our understanding of self - narratives that define individual worth by our income, that associate our value with our productivity, and that work off the assumption that those who have much have earned it (which is a theology of its own) and those who have little haven't done their fair part. How does God free us from this thinking and where does it lead us?

- Social application - There's no way to get around the hard truth of this text. Jesus' metaphor couldn't make it any more clear - there's no fitting that camel through a needle's eye. Consider addressing the why of it in your sermon. What pits the Kingdom of God and the rich against one another? How does this play out in actual enfolded lives? Reminding people that the Kingdom is not a mere post-life reality (this text is not about life after death but our collective life now) move into what matters most about wealth. It's not whether we have it or not but all the systems and exploitation it's attached to and thus, those with money, are attached to. If your congregation is not the wealthy but those who struggle because of the wealthy, the text bears hope. Unpacking the "why" in this context can lead to a deeper understanding of a God who is adamantly committed to ending economic injustice, unwilling to excuse people or systems that provide comfort and security for some at the expense of death, struggle, and exploitation. The only solution, as the text gets to at the end, is a togetherness committed to a radically different way of being together where the wealth gap is removed altogether and resources are shared. This isn't a path that can be created individually, in isolation, and no one should be left to struggle on their own - like so many are today. God's economy will be lived out in community. The love Jesus expresses towards the rich man and the love Jesus practices with the disciples all lead in the same direction - shedding whatever commitments we have to systems of destruction and trading them in for the believe that the impossible can be accomplished together. You may also choose to approach the text as an invitation to think about economic justice, not as a matter of simply giving money away when someone has a lot of it, but as a reformation of the entire system that depends on people staying in poverty. Jesus calls here, not just for charity, but for a redistribution of wealth and power. This opens avenues for talking about reparations to various populations for labor that has been exploited for centuries.

- Personal and interpersonal application - This is the only time in all of the gospel of Mark that Jesus expressed love towards a particular person. Was Jesus responding to this man's sincerity? What he feeling affection for him as the man struggled to wrap his mind and heart around God's vision for the world, so much bigger and more radical than following rules for their own sake? Whatever was moving Jesus, it led him to call the man more deeply into the heart of God where the man would be set free from his own compliance with destruction and

others would be able to live more freely too. The man's grief at what he must give up in order to live into the mind and heart of God doesn't necessarily mean he chooses not to do it. When we are forced to address the ways we are exploitive, it should fill us with grief! We are all connected to systems that are doing deep harm to individuals who labor. The food we eat is connected to exploitation of people, land, and animals. The technology we use and clothes we wear - connected to exploitation. We may not all have the same power that this man has to make significant changes, but it's not hard to imagine the heaviness of the task Jesus sets before him - for his own sake and the sake of others. Consider taking on the connections between the sincere love and affection of God for us as individuals and the call to live more deeply into that love by doing hard things, things that may grieve us, things that seem utterly impossible.

Words for inspiration:

We need always to be thinking and writing about poverty, for if we are not among its victims its reality fades from us. We must talk about poverty, because people insulated by their own comfort lose sight of it.

- Dorothy Day, *By Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day*

Keep your finger on the pulse of the world

[The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement](#)

[The Kavanaugh hearing puts white male entitlement on angry display](#)

[How Reliable Are the Memories of Sexual Assault Victims?](#)

[Reports overlooked wealth gap as factor behind 1960s riots](#)

[Digital IDs Are More Dangerous Than You Think](#)



Copyright

A subscription to Liturgy that Matters grants permission for one person or one faith community to use these materials for worship and preparation. Sharing enfleshed materials further violates the term of the subscription and hinders the well-being of enfleshed and its potential to serve the church in growing capacities.

Please ensure attribution to enfleshed is included somewhere on your worship materials anytime enfleshed liturgies are used. If any changes are made to the liturgy, [adapted by ____] must be included in the attribution. Email info@enfleshed.com with any further questions or permissions.