

## **Sermon - Sunday September 20th, 2020 - Matthew 20:1-16**

Our current economic reality is often being compared to that of The Great Depression 100 years ago. The impact of the pandemic (to say nothing of the many other things unfolding in our world) on our economy boggles our imagination and makes our hearts a bit skittish.

We live in a world, it seems, where we are having to choose between a robust economy with bars and restaurants open or the health and well-being of our neighbours.

This is not new, of course. This is the world we have always lived in, it is just in sharper relief right now.

This is the world to which Jesus tells his outrageous story in today's gospel about what the kingdom of heaven is like.

“So what,” we might think - God is generous. Everyone got paid.

It's not that simple. These day labourers, much like personal support workers in our time or migrant workers, were on the bottom rung of the pay scale. They made just enough to feed themselves and their family - hopefully. There were no savings, no holidays, no safety net.

So when the vineyard owner pays those who show up for an hour the same daily wage, this isn't just about unfairness. This is injustice. The kind of injustice that we know in the marrow of our bones.

This is the injustice of God and it is called Grace. It is offensive. It is poor business management. It leads to bankruptcy and division.

Well, it would lead to those things in our current world, in our current economic set up. But in the kingdom of God, it leads to life, equity, and justice.

This dramatic, offensive and bad-business story comes just before Jesus begins his journey to the cross. Things are going to get messy for the followers of Jesus (not to mention Jesus himself). This injustice of God, this grace, will be thrown into sharp relief against the injustice and corruption of the world.

We find ourselves in a world that is just as unbalanced. Our footing is not secure. Our sense of well-being is not peace-filled. And into this, God speaks again, about a Kingdom that looks so different from this world, and challenges our imaginations with it. For the Kingdom of God is not something we wait for, it is something we create with God in this world.

What could that possibly look like?

I read an article this week about those on the very edges of American society. These were families and elderly couples living in abandoned motels, often without water or electricity. They used vodka to relieve the pain of their illnesses that they didn't have the money to treat or medicate. They worked jobs, when they could find them, at minimum wage to make just enough money to eat, and not well. It was an appalling story.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/national/kissimmee-star-motel/>

What can we possibly do to create this offensive grace of an economy that Jesus is suggesting in this gospel parable in a world where so many are living in appalling situations?

Gratefully and I suspect, not by accident, I also stumbled on some other articles this week that spoke to this different vision, this offensive grace. One was about a group of Canadian millennials who belong to something called the Resource Movement. From their website:

Resource Movement is a community of young people with wealth and/or class privilege working toward the redistribution of wealth, land, and power. One of their proposals is for more taxation of the wealthy, that is, themselves.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/millennials-taxes-rich-wealth-resource-movement-inequality-pandemic-1.5726557>

The pandemic has also brought into the conversation, again, the concept of a Basic or Universal Income.

Basic Income or Universal Basic income, in simplest terms, is the idea that every citizen gets a basic income, regardless of their status or ability to work, that allows them to live with the basic necessities of life.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/basic-income-could-lift-singles-out-of-deep-poverty-thunder-bay-activist-1.5726389>

And in a Forbes article I read about a paper co-written by numerous global thought leaders entitled: 'Covid and the New World Order - Actionable insights from global technology thought leaders', - The paper urges a rethinking of the economic system, to rethink what we value, and to rethink how we live. It's focus is "building a new human-centred economy".

"We are simply humans who have a deep belief that we must do something; that ordinary people can actually change things in this world that really need to be

improved, and we want to invite everyone interested in this mission to join us,” says one of the authors.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/lawrencewintermeyer/2020/09/17/coivd-and-the-new-world-orderbuiding-a-new-human-centered-economy/#6a7ddae378f0>

I offer these items from the news this week because the good news of God’s Kingdom is already in our midst. The economic tragedy and disruption we are in right now is an opportunity, yet again, to build a world more in keeping with God’s heart.

Let us take these challenging thoughts and contemplate them prayerfully, allowing our imaginations to dream of a world where God’s outrageous grace allows for all to be fully engaged in a life worth living. An economy, not based on profits, but on outrageous love for all. Amen.