

“The Bottom Line”

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1Timothy 2:1-7

Luke 16:1-13

[The Apostle Paul wrote,]

First of all, I ask you to pray for everyone.

Ask God to help and bless them all,

and tell God how thankful you are for each of them.

1Timothy 2:1

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to see our common bond with those who seek justice and peace
through nonviolence and a commitment to love.

May our bottom line for what is most important be about

what is best for all people and for the world on which we live.

Amen

Now, Jesus had been invited to have dinner at the house of a senior Pharisee;

It was the Sabbath, and other Pharisees were there as guests,
no doubt to keep an eye on him.

After the meal, Jesus was once again out among multitudes of people

and at one point, he began to tell them a series of parables –
including this parable of the corrupt steward.

The parable of the corrupt steward is really a joke – Jesus was telling a joke

in order to teach a lesson to his listeners about ‘the powers that be’ of their day
in the First Century CE.

This story’s characters confirm the observations of such contemporary theologians
as Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg about the social realities of that time.

The Romans levied extortionate taxes with the help of the hated tax collectors

to push out the ancestral owners of the land who couldn’t keep up –
and tearing up the fabric of traditional society.

These properties were absorbed into estates owned by absentee landlords,

and run by stewards – like this one who managed the commerce of the estate
or rather, mismanaged it.

When the ‘rich man’ or landowner, learns of this corrupt steward ‘wasting his goods’-

or another version says, ‘wasting money’ [CEV], he fires the steward ,
who scrambles to get on the good side of the estate’s debtors.

Actually, these were businesses who owed goods like oil and wheat,

so the steward got them to rewrite their bills, indicating less amounts
for what was apparently already paid for by the estate.

Willard, p.2

Now, in Jesus' story, the landlord finds out about this and commends the steward for his cleverness ?!

⁸ The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness; for the [children] of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the [children] of light.

So, here we have an example how authority figures in Jesus' parables should not necessarily be equated with God.

What Jesus seems to be saying is that – in an absolute sense, corruption rewards corruption with business finance providing the scenario for this power play of greed.

We should also not assume that 'business' or 'finance', is inherently evil, though this does provide a ready opportunity for abuse.

Jesus then tells them all,

... make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon... [as if to say, 'Go ahead. Make your little deals...'] so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations.

Notice that he said 'eternal habitations' – and did not say "Heaven"; Jesus was telling a joke and mocking the system that was in place – even back then.

Then, he goes back to being serious again when he says,

¹⁰ "[The one] who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and [the one] who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.

¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches?

After Jesus told this parable to the gathered multitudes,

verses 14-15 that follow, mention that Pharisees were also present...

The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they scoffed at him. But [Jesus] said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. Luke 16:14-15

I usually edit out direct references to 'men' which assumes a patriarchal perspective, but in this instance, I kept it because we are talking about a system of power that has favored men in various "empires" – including our own society.

This is an important realization in the midst of an era of great change – or revelation, and I mean that in the sense of unveiling what has been covered up, neglected, and ignored.

We are finally getting a language for talking about these dynamics and mechanisms that the people of Jesus' time could only talk about figuratively as angels and demons, miracles, and parables.

Willard, p.3

God is still speaking to us through these stories – not only for our individual salvation through a personal relationship with our Creator, but also calling us into lives of purpose for the sake of all humankind and the world on which we live.

It still comes down to how do we invest ourselves? What do we give our lives to? How do we render unto Caesar and still render unto God?

What is ‘The Bottom Line’, as they say in the business world, for what is profitable? Or as Jesus said in Mark 8:36-37...

For what does it profit [someone], to gain the whole world and forfeit [their] life?

For what can [someone] give in return for [their] life?

Right now there is a confrontation going on for the sake of cheap oil at the risk of endangering a community’s water supply.

The community of the Standing Rock Sioux have sought to block the construction of a 3.8 billion dollar, 1,172 mile oil pipeline by a company called the Dakota Access.

The Dakota Access Pipe Line or DAPL is built mostly on private land and actually does not cross tribal property, though within a mile of it.

There are two concerns for the Native people in that region:

First, that the pipeline will cross the Missouri River which – if there was a breach, it would threaten the principle source of drinking water for that community.

Second, that lands that are sacred or culturally significant to Native people will be affected by the construction.

Lawsuits were filed on the grounds that the Native community was not properly consulted.

However, a federal judge upheld the corporation’s legally obtained permits received from the US Army Corps of Engineers.

At which point, the tribe filed for appeal.

Then, the Department of Justice intervened to stop construction

by not issuing the last permit needed – which happened to be on federal land, 20 miles on either side of Lake Oahe.

http://earthjustice.org/features/faq-standing-rock-litigation?gclid=CjoKEQjwo_O-BRCfjsCw25CYzYoBEiQAqO9BDPoCq7Dfp8k9EivyYTg_UzILmHLLhs9tSMePAoJoVpQaAndo8P8HAQ

This was a joint action by the DOJ, the Corps of Engineers, and the Department of the Interior;

It is unprecedented given the fact that permits were already issued according to Richard Epstein who serves as a consultant

for Midwest Alliance for Infrastructure Now

‘a coalition of businesses, labor, and agricultural interests that will benefit from the completion of the pipeline in a timely, safe and efficient fashion.’

Willard, p.4

Mr. Epstein goes on to say,

'The preemptory action of the DOJ after [Federal] Judge Boasberg's decision is a direct threat to the entire permitting process on which all parties have a right to rely.'

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/richardepstein/2016/09/14/why-the-doj-order-to-shut-down-construction-on-the-dapl-pipeline-is-legally-indefensible/#46d2df8b1b42>

He is speaking about abiding by decisions made according to the rule of law, but is that interpretation of the law just?

Representatives of about 100 tribes have gathered to protest and block construction and leaders of those tribes have gathered in unprecedented unity.

The protest has been nonviolent for the most part,

but not without unfortunate exceptions on both sides of this issue.

The Chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux, David Archambault II gave this hopeful message:

We have tribes and people from all over the world coming in support of this and if you believe and if you have faith – whether the ruling is in our favor or not, there is nothing but good things that are going to come.

And I want to thank each and every one of you for your presence, for your commitment, and for your support.

And I also want to ask that you remain nonviolent.

We were told by the spirits that without violence we could beat this pipeline.

With prayer and with peace we can beat this pipeline.

So I ask that you stand down from any illegal activity or any violence [sic] activity.

And just pray and have faith and believe and the Creator will take this to where we are supposed to be.

http://earthjustice.org/features/faq-standing-rock-litigation?gclid=CjoKEQjwo_O-BRCfjsCw25CYzYoBEiQAqO9BDPocq7Dfp8k9EivyYTg_UzILmHLLhs9tSMePAoJoVpQaAndo8P8HAQ

There is a lot of money involved – 3.8 billion dollars along with permits already issued, probably means that this pipeline is going through.

But there is something to be said for this confrontation

that brings to light mechanisms of power that were at work even in Jesus' day and also the dynamics of a common Spirit that yearns for justice.

Willard, p.5

The Native American people in their stand against the corporate powers
are reminding us all that oil and water don't mix and that
what is more important is that 'water is life' –
or 'mini wiconi', as they say.

I speak about such issues from current events -
not to endorse a particular political position,
but to lift up visions and possibilities and realities
of how what we talk about on Sunday mornings
is at work amidst the great struggles of our time.

The Kingdom of God, the Body of Christ, the Beloved Community
must really be more diverse and bigger than we can take in
from any one point of view, and yet how Christ is still recognizable
in the common yearning for what is healthy, just, peaceful, and compassionate.
Then, the bottom line is really about what is good
for all people and even the Earth itself.

Amen

Our lesson today from 1Timothy 2:1-7 describes the tricky balance preachers have always had rendering to God what is God's through Christ –the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, while rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's...

[The Apostle Paul wrote,]

¹First of all,

I ask you to pray for everyone.

Ask God to help and bless them all,

and tell God how thankful you are for each of them.

² Pray for kings and others in power,

so that we may live quiet and peaceful lives

as we worship and honor God.

³ This kind of prayer is good,

and it pleases God our Savior.

⁴ God wants everyone to be saved and to know the whole truth, which is,

⁵ There is only one God, and Christ Jesus is the only one

who can bring us to God.

Jesus was truly human, and he gave himself to rescue all of us.

⁶ God showed us this at the right time.

⁷ This is why God chose me to be a preacher

and an apostle of the good news.

I am telling the truth. I am not lying.

God sent me to teach the Gentiles about faith and truth.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Luke 16:1-13

¹ [Jesus] also said to the disciples,

“There was a rich man who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods.

² And he called him and said to him,

‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’

³ And the steward said to himself,

‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.

⁴ I have decided what to do,

so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.’

⁵ So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first,

‘How much do you owe my master?’

⁶ He said,

‘A hundred measures of oil.’

And he said to him,

‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’

⁷ Then he said to another,

‘And how much do you owe?’

He said,

‘A hundred measures of wheat.’

He said to him,

‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’

⁸ The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness; for the [children] of this world are more shrewd

in dealing with their own generation than the [children] of light.

⁹ And I tell you,

make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations.

¹⁰ “[The one] who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and [the one] who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.

¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches?

¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?

¹³ No servant can serve two masters;

for either [they] will hate the one and love the other, or ... be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and mammon[, You cannot serve God and greed].”