

Amos 8:4-7

Luke 16:1-14

1 Tim. 2:1-7

“Praise the Lord, who raises
the poor from the dust and
the needy from the ash heap. Praise the Lord.”
AMEN!

(Sing)
Woke up this morning with my mind...
set on Jesus!

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Woke up this morning with my mi-nd...
set on Jesus!

Allelu, allelu, allelu-ia!

Siblings in Christ, that is what we need
to sing today for the words set before us
from Jesus and from Amos can sting.

In Amos, we have a prophetic declaration:
Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land.

It's the voice of God, through Amos,
declaring how human beings put profit and
money and business strategies as

their most important masters.

The prophet spoke against
the objectification of people
locked in poverty.

Now, I know not one of you do this!
How do I know?

I know because you would have
already left St. Stephen for some other church,
one that ignores Jesus' teaching on caring
for the poor, well before even
Pastor Tom came here!

But, that does not mean we don't need
to feel the sting from Amos' testimony.

We should know, we do know,
how in our system, playing the game
results in the displacement of so many people.

How business as usual, should not be usual.

Amos had not met Jesus but his words
reminds us that we forget to wake up
with Jesus on our minds.

Someone once said anyone who says they

like the Book of Amos aren't reading it
carefully enough... critically enough...
taking the words to heart enough.

Here, and in other parts of the prophetic work,
Amos addresses those

business tactics put forth by the powerful
to get rich while neglecting the sabbath.

Tactics that make defeating
the competitor the primary purpose even
if you have to cheat a little.

That's what Amos means when he says
"We will make the ephah small and
the shekel great."

The ephah was the dry measure equivalent
to a bushel.

If one makes the ephah small then
the measured amount of food
is shorted/skimmed and the shekel

becomes greater because the business person
sold less product for the same price.

People become enslaved to dishonesty and greed.

Who loses?

The worldly answer is the buyer,
but Amos proclaimed that seller's win
is a short term victory.

For God proclaims that
“playing the game” of dishonesty
will result in the displacement of the masses;

playing that game tramples the poor and
leads to long term suffering because the few
have used the goods and opportunities of
this world to make life better
for themselves at
the expense of others.

When we count, measure, expect to have
and think that we deserve it all, we will never
be fulfilled and it will eventually trample us.

(Pause)

But, pastor, you said we don't have
to worry about this! :-)

Week, I didn't say that.

I said not one of us (as far as I know) do

the cheating/stealing/dishonest
business tactics but we still need
to worry about them because in some
way or another...
we've played that game.

We've been silent in the midst of supremacy,
accepted an advantage here or there
without questioning those who suffer...
we've played that game.

Which brings us to the gospel lesson and the
parable from Luke.

Jesus told a parable that is problematic for us...
most of us... even Biblical scholars
because we gotta make a choice and

Jesus sounds like he encourages his followers
to be "shrewd," the same word to describe
the serpent in Genesis, and

the dishonest manager is commended
for going behind the back of the boss to
cut the debts that people owed to the master.

We don't need to go far to see how people
get angry when debts for others are erased.

Just look at the anger over
student debt forgiveness.

You know me, I proclaim a non-dualistic Jesus.

That's the both/and Jesus, but when it comes
to the poor and money,

Jesus is either/or and in the parable today,
we are directed to use our wealth in an
upside-down Jesus kind of way.

To not be slaves to it, but make money
work for God's Work.

If we spend all our time on making money,
stepping on others; playing the
same old game...
we suffer from a "Mammon Illness."

"Mammon" is the Greek word from
where we get the translation "wealth."

It means we given ourselves
over to the god of money.

And that is where our gospel is crystal clear.

We can debate over the behavior of

the unjust steward and debate
the forgiveness of debts, but there's
no debate about Jesus' main message

It is crystal clear: No one can serve
the God of Love AND serve
the god of money.

So, what is one thing we can do?

Well, Brenda Christie will bring us
a message of one way to serve God.

(Introduce Brenda)

God has put her before us to hear
what we have already been a part of.

This beginning relationship is one of the tools
we have as a people of God.

This is a way for us to obey
the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Pause)

Jesus asks us, "If money is a short-term answer
to short term problems then what is
the long term answer?"

And we find our answer to the question in his parable.

For the almost fired manager sought out
each person that he defrauded and
lowered their bill.

And Jesus' message for us is
to value relationships over money.

It's not that money is evil or even bad.

His message is that we should be wise with it
(be shrewd with wealth just like
the children of this age)
but use it as a tool, not as a way
to guarantee anything or give
a false sense of worth or

an excuse to be superior over the people God loves.

Since it is the kingdom of God we want.

Not in some future place or other time, but on
earth right here and right now, then we
must stop counting, measuring and
expecting to deserve things from God.

If we continue to be enslaved by mammon then
there are going to be consequences. (Hm)

We heard one way.

Let's keep moving forward
with our minds set on Jesus.

You are the hope for a better world!

AMEN!