

Home Economics

Mark 6:30-44

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, (Oct. 5) 2024

Tithe Sunday

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The first date Jane and I ever had was at church. Months before we had met at church and our first “date” was at church, and to lunch after church. She was a bedrock member of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. She was there every Sunday and every Wednesday evening and had been for seven or eight years. One Sunday I was guest preaching at a church in the suburbs of Louisville, and when I looked out at the congregation and there was Jane. Whoa! This was a big deal. Suddenly, things had gone from our flirting with one another at Wednesday night Baptist Peacemaker group to her showing up to hear me preach. She was actually taking a Sunday off from her church to come hear me. I was both excited and nervous and really wanted to make a good impression.

I also wanted to take her to lunch after church. The problem was I didn’t have any money. So, after the service I went up to the church treasurer and asked if he could pay me in cash instead of a check. He and some of the deacons and ushers started looking around, going through the morning offering and going through their own pockets and came up with a total of \$7.00. This was in the days when everyone wrote checks, but no one used cash. So, they gave me the \$7.00 and for the rest they wrote a check.

After inviting her to Sunday lunch and confessing that I only had \$7.00, she dug through her own wallet and came up with an additional \$5.00. We drove in her car, since mine was an unreliable clunker, and went to the Captain’s Quarters, an

upscale restaurant overlooking a beautiful spot on the Ohio River. We shared a salad and drank water, while the waiter frowned at us for not spending any more than \$12.00.

I tell this story because sharing our meager finances was not only emblematic of our marriage to come, but it was also about us practicing a different kind of economics.

Economist Herman Daly says that Aristotle made a distinction between *oikonomia* and *chrematistics*. *Oikonomia*, from which we get our word economy, is rooted in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning home or household. *Oikonomia*, according to Aristotle, is the science or art of efficiently producing, distributing, and maintaining concrete use values for the household and community over the long haul. In other words, it is managing the finances of the household and/or community for long-term stewardship. Home economics.

Chrematistics is the science or art of maximizing the accumulation by individuals of abstract exchange value in the form of money in the short run. In other words, this is about making short-term profit (see Herman Daly, Foreword to *What Matters: Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth* by Wendell Berry, p. x-xi).

To put it in the terms of our first date. We were about *oikonomia* – home economics. The long-term care and tending of one another and sharing with one another. In contrast, standard economic practice in this country is about *chrematistics* – abstract exchange of money for short-term profit – self-interest economics or what it is popularly called today, free-market economics. Jane and I were not interested in self-interested, free-market economics. We were on the front end of sharing a life together.

This morning we go back to Mark's telling of Jesus feeding the 5,000. We spent time on this story a few weeks ago, so I'll only touch on some things. But I want you to notice that out there in the wilderness there are two economies at work: *oikonomia* – home economics, and *chrematistics* – self-interest or free-market economics.

Jesus and the disciples are out in the wilderness trying to get away from the crowds who find them anyway. It's getting late, everyone is tired and hungry. The disciples are getting anxious. "Jesus, what's the plan? Send these people away. Tell them to go to the nearby surrounding towns and buy themselves something to eat and we'll see them tomorrow."

Jesus says, "You feed them."

This sends the disciples over the edge. Their anxiety boils over. "Holy cow! It would take seven or eight hundred thousand dollars to feed this crowd just one meal!"

To put it in today's economic terms, the disciples immediately lapse into free-market economics, sending the crowds into the stores to buy food and looking at their own financial resources, realizing they were woefully short of money. They cannot pay their own bills, make the rent, the house payment, the car payment, the insurance, school debt, credit card debt, other debts, and pay for the feeding of all these strangers, too! "Besides, some of these people in this crowd are bound to be immigrants and we sure would not want to help them with a free meal. And many of these people are probably just looking for a free handout and if we give it to them, we're just creating a permanent dependent class."

Jesus says, "You guys need to lighten-up." And he proceeds to practice an

alternative economics, home economics. He says to the disciples, “Go bring me what you can find, and we’ll work from that.” So, the disciples return with five loaves of bread and two fish and Jesus directs the crowd to sit down in small groups. Then he holds up the bread and fish, blesses it, and has the disciples begin to distribute the food.

At this point, we’re not sure what happens but we do know that the entire crowd of at least, 5,000 people are fed with enough food left over to fill twelve baskets full.

Commentators disagree about what happened. Some believe that in a kind of eucharistic-sacramental-mysterious way the bread and fish were mystically transformed so everyone was fed. Other commentators believe that when Jesus held up the loaves and fishes and began to distribute them, the people sitting in small groups took out their own sack lunches and began to share with one another.

To me, I’ve long believed that these two interpretations were not exclusive. We did not need to choose one version over the other. My view is that both things happened. The sacramental and the sharing go together so everyone has enough.

Here in this story, Jesus practices what I’m calling this morning “home economics,” and sometimes called, “neighborly economics.” What Herman Daly and Aristotle called *oikonomia*. It is about sharing and caring for one another and those around us. It is not about self-interest but about shared interest.

Shared interest and long-term care and stewardship of each other, the earth and the earth’s resources is Bible economics from front to finish. Self-interest economics could also be called “pharaoh’s economics,” which is all about insatiable acquisitiveness. Which is also why Mark keeps showing the disciples

getting themselves into trouble because their “hearts were hardened” (see 6:52 for example), which is Bible code language for what we might call, “pharaoh’s disease.”

On this first Sunday of October every year, we gather around the Lord’s Table and share Christ’s bread among us, while practicing home economics. We usually call it “Tithe Sunday,” encouraging you to learn to give and share at least your first 10% of your income to God, with the prayer that God will work in and through all our offerings and tithes to care for our neighbors. Here we are building a shared life; we are committed to one another and raising one another’s children in Christ and being loyal to one another in ways surpassing self-interested ways.

This morning, we give our tithes and offerings, and the ushers will bring all our offerings forward, including the bread and juice – all are brought forward and offered to God. As always, you will be invited to gather around the table together and receive the body and blood of Christ from one another and share it with one another. No one takes the Lord’s Supper on their own. Everyone shares. And it is in this sharing that Christ Jesus is known among us.

The same is true for our money. Christ Jesus is known among us when we share it.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God, Mother of us all. Amen.