

## The Kingdom Economy

*God be in our head, our eyes, our mouth and our heart as we contemplate your word this day. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

I used to live in San Rafael, California, a beautiful, wealthy area north of San Francisco. As I drove to my job as an investment banker, I would see men gathered on the street corners downtown. Most climbed into the beds of passing pick-up trucks or the occasional Mercedes or Volvo that would stop. But you could still find a few of them standing on those corners well into the afternoon.

I soon learned that the men were day laborers, hoping to earn enough cash to provide bread for their family that day. I'm sure some of them did the landscaping in my yard. So here I was, nearly two millennia removed from Jesus' parable. Day laboring was still a way people got by. And I was a privileged and somewhat clueless vineyard owner.

Jesus said that the laborers hired at the end of the day still got a full day's wage, enough bread for one more day. When I heard this gospel back then, I scratched my head, because paying everyone the same just did not make economic sense. It certainly didn't make sense to the grumbling laborers hired first. And I figured that the vineyard owner in the story, or my landscape contractor, would quickly go broke with such a policy. But what about the guys on the street corners still waiting for work into the afternoon? Did their kids eat enough that night?

I tried to make peace with my inner tensions around this parable by understanding it as an allegory about the economics of the kingdom of heaven. The wealth underlying kingdom economics is love. Extravagant, saving love. As Jesus tells Nicodemus:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

*Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)*

Kingdom economics is based on giving and forgiving with the currency of love. By grace, the free gift of Christ's love nourishes us. In response, his love becomes ours to give back to God and to the world. The laws governing this kingdom economics are found in the two great commandments:

*'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)*

In the math of kingdom economics, variables like time and quantity seem unimportant. God welcomes all, loves all and forgives all.

Early in the morning or five o'clock. Cradle Christian or late to the game. Lifelong laborer in God's mission fields or just figuring it out in the evening of life. Best friends since childhood or finding new companionship in old age. Letting go of a grudge held for years or just apologizing for yesterday's tiff. In God's kingdom, it doesn't matter. All

love, all forgiveness, radiate the gifts God has bestowed on us as our father's precious children. All the laborers are assured their daily bread in the landowner's vineyard.

Well, allegory is fine. But as I thought about the day laborers on those San Rafael street corners, I also realized that allegory would not feed their hungry families. I'm not proud to say that over the years, I've continued to wrestle with the visceral nature of this gospel. See, Jesus isn't just talking about a daily wage of sustaining love and forgiveness. He's talking about the daily wage that buys bread. Real bread.

Paul tells the Philippians to *"live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ..."* (Philippians 1:27) Scripture occasionally loses something in translation. In this case, "live your life" is a Greek verb meaning "to live as a citizen." Roman citizenship, a concept understood well by the Philippian community, meant specific rights and responsibilities, a way of living in society under a set of laws. As Christians, we hold a kind of dual citizenship. It is our duty and our joy to bring the laws and economy of our earthly society into harmony with the laws and economy of God's reign. Love of God and neighbor means nothing less than striving for a world governed by God's mercy and justice. That includes making sure we all have our daily bread.

Especially in these charged, partisan times, Jesus' call to build a world of extravagant love in which we all have enough can seem idealistic, impossible even. Yet the need is great. As just one example, the cash economy laborers on those street corners in San Rafael are right here today, hidden in plain sight in our own neighborhoods. This afternoon at 4:00 pm, at our online Northwest Region Convocation, The Rev. John Carter, a member of Trinity, Lime Rock, will speak about his experiences as Hispanic Missioner in the Northwest corner. Please join the conversation to listen, to discern and perhaps to respond. (The link is in Fr. David's email from Wednesday, or I can send it to you.)

Though new to St. Mark's, I've already learned how even in this pandemic, you continue to support God's reign of extravagant love, of daily bread for all. You love and support each other. You give generously to the Bridgewater food pantry. You reach out across the year through the Covenant to Care. Yet there is so much more to do.

Remember that in your faith and faithfulness, there is power. *"Standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,"* (Philippians 1:27), let's explore together God's saving work in our midst. How might the Holy Spirit be inviting us to help bring the economy of God's reign to a needy world?

It says on our website that "St. Mark's Parish has been a cornerstone of the Bridgewater Community since 1810." With God's help, may we live ever more deeply into that great heritage. After he had washed his disciples' feet, Jesus told them:

*Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34b-35)*

Or, as the song says, *"They will know we Christians by our love."*

