

# Watching, Forgiving Debts

*How Jesus teaches us to love*

A sermon by The Rev. Drew Downs

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Proper 14C | Luke 12:32-40

There's a single word in the Lord's Prayer we often miss.

Remember a few weeks ago how the disciples asked Jesus how to pray? He gave them a familiar sequence in response about hallowing, heaven, and daily bread.

Then he says

“And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.”

Did you notice? Jesus links sin and indebtedness.

He doesn't say being indebted is sinful. He says

*Forgive our sin as we forgive debts.*

*Forgive us as we right our wrongs.*

*Forgive us as we fix our problems.*

And our wrongs have been to subject others to ourselves. To enslave them in debts. It is why Jesus has more to say about economics in the kingdom of GOD than anything else.

Jesus's understanding of the kingdom comes from the Jubilee: the divine act of setting things right, of cancelling all debts, and restoring right relationship with GOD. He is inviting his followers to become Jubilee people.

We remember this as we enter into these fascinating stories a chapter later.

## Three Reminders.

Chapter 12 begins with a reminder from Jesus to trust in GOD and not in the Jewish leaders. They are deceitful and greedy.

They receive Jesus's scorn because these two things lead them to be complicit with Rome. They aren't helping the people, they are maintaining their power and authority.

So as we get into the context of this morning's part of the gospel, think about these three things:

The world, our culture wants to *sell* you on wealth and power. It wants to *bribe* you and *buy you off*. It wants you *indebted* to its ways.

Disciples are Jubilee people. Spanners of the breach. Who reconcile the world by getting rid of what enslaves us: wealth and power. By forgiving debts and making us equal.

Because GOD is about love and liberation.

Today we have the conclusion to a sequence about GOD's hatred of greed which we began last week.

## Jesus gives us four ways GOD hates greed.

Remember that there was this man in the crowd who demands Jesus act as judge in a court and force the man's brother to

share their inheritance with him. It is an audacious demand when we think about it, but I think many of us would sympathize with the man's plight. We don't like the thought of one brother taking advantage of another.

Jesus instead responds directly with a warning. We shouldn't hear this as quiet with an "I told you so" tone, but with sincerity and force:

"Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Greed is sin. Our lives aren't based in ownership. Who we are is not dependent on the brands we wear or the stuff we hoard. But greed is tricky and takes many forms. So...

### 1) We mistake greed for prudence.

The man is worrying about himself and the economic injustice of his brother stealing his inheritance. But Jesus points to the wider economic injustice of fighting over stuff at all. The privilege of inheritance and ownership and the dangers it poses to GOD's children.

Then Jesus tells a story about a rich fool. And we need to remind ourselves that Jesus thinks the man in his parable is a fool. He is wicked. He is hurting people by depriving them for his selfish needs.

As Ched Myers argues:

"The *land* is the protagonist in this story; abundance results from *its* work, not the farmer's."

GOD creates the growth, GOD produces. Humans plan, but GOD provides the growth.

### 2) We think our stuff is ours.

We mistake our hard work for the right, the inheritance, to own its results. We think we deserve to own the fruits of our labors, but to Jesus, the owner isn't us, it's GOD. As Paul argues in his letter to Corinth: He planted, Apollos watered, and GOD grew.

But Jesus isn't only concerned with ownership. He's concerned with the allure of safety.

The Foolish rich man, remember, is not only trying to store up GOD's stuff and call it his. He's doing so for a rainy day. Just in case. Not because GOD has ever suggested this is how to do things, but to relieve his own anxiety.

### 3) Our culture wants us to fear scarcity.

We look at our economics as zero-sum and then feel justified in protecting ourselves from tomorrow.

Jesus, on the other hand, thinks that's bad faith. And worse, counter the gospel message he came to proclaim.

He then gives examples from nature to explain true wealth.

1. Life is more than stuff.
2. Ravens find food every day.
3. Lilies grow up toward the sun without anxiety and tortured bodies.

### 4) Greed is a lack of faith in GOD.

Greed leads us to hurt and indebt and coerce and murder and steal and reject the way of Jesus out of fear. Our culture is just like Rome's. We love wealth and power. We

reinforce a scarcity mindset and fear of the foreigner. We discourage trust in GOD and encourage hoarding of our possessions. We worship at the altar of merit and responsibility and reject compassion and simplicity.

This is what Jesus is talking about when he wraps it all up with his 6th invocation to not be afraid!

1. Don't be afraid.
2. Counter the greed system of consuming and hoarding by selling off your stuff. And counter the system of indebting our neighbors by giving money to the poor.
3. Make a heaven on earth where the many kinds of greed are gone.

These are the watchwords for his followers. His disciples, his apostles, who have already gone into the world to do his work. Already turned back demons and transformed lives. Already healed the sick and proclaimed good news to the poor!

And words to the hangers-on who are just finding out about this guy and the power he has given his followers.

And words to the skeptics and the angry and those who refuse to trust that GOD is doing this new thing in Jesus.

And then he tells them to watch. For the kingdom time is coming.

### **Watching is doing.**

We might not believe that to be true. It feels so passive, especially in light of the call to reject fear and sell our stuff and give the money to the poor. That's active.

In light of countering a powerful system of oppression and division; which likes to pit a white working class against a black working

class; which likes to pit women workers against their male coworkers; which likes to pit ally against ally so we don't wake up to the problems in the system. In our unequal economy. Our Rome reborn.

It may feel passive, but it takes action. Watching is doing. Watch is a verb. So is Wake.

As in stay awake. Awake to the world. Awake to injustice. Awake to abuse and oppression. Awake to indebtedness. Awake to sin. Awake to division. Awake to hatred. Awake to inequality. Awake to racism and sexism and ableism and all forms of bigotry. Awake to insecurity. Awake to hopelessness. Awake to cruelty. Awake to all the ways we reject what GOD is trying to do with us. Because...

If we aren't awake, we can't realize the Kingdom.

If we aren't awake, we can't fix the problem.

If we aren't awake, we can't forgive debts.

If we aren't awake, we can't sell our stuff and give to the poor.

If we aren't awake, we can't build each other up.

If we aren't awake, we can't find hope in the birds and the flowers and all of creation.

If we aren't awake, we can't teach and listen.

If we aren't awake, we can't soothe and comfort.

If we aren't awake, we can't love.

### **To be awake means to see.**

To see all problems as fixable.

To see all issues as opportunities.

To see all struggles as building something important and all failures as the cost

To see all the new life being born around us.  
 To see all of creation as revealing more about GOD than our greed-infused culture.  
 To see all of our neighbors as brothers and sisters.  
 To see all of the good GOD is doing in spite of the challenges.

This is what it means to see. To watch. To wait for the kingdom.

It isn't passive. It isn't going on vacation and putting the blinders on to reality. It isn't avoiding the tough stuff so that we can pretend everybody agrees about everything.

**We mistake our silos for safety.** We hide in our bunkers and we think everybody else is hiding in their bunker. We make our friends into enemies and conspire to make ridiculous expectations and erroneous assumptions about them.

**That's why we need to be awake. Because none of that division is true.**

We are blessed children of a GOD who loves us all and provokes us all and wants us to build one another up. But we can't do that on a false foundation of sleepwalking and hot-button avoidance. We have to be awake. We have to look each other in the eye and love each other **because** we're different.

**Because love is what we do.**

Jesus loves to point out that loving people close to you is easy. Real love is the hard kind. Loving the people you don't like. Loving the people on the wrong team.

Luke, more than the other evangelists, places action in the hands of his followers long before they get to Jerusalem.

He builds them up long before they confront Rome. Long before they receive the coming of the Spirit in the Pentecost Event. Long before they are ready to do the work.

of striving.

He shows them receiving this message to be awake in the world before they even know what it means. And I think he does this so that the disciples will know what's up. That they know what they're going to see when they get to Jerusalem. That they will understand the true cruelty of Rome.

And we will know as we read along. As we follow, too. As we follow Jesus to Jerusalem. That we will see the real Rome.

Jesus wants us awake to the kingdom now. Now. Not later. Not when school starts this and in the next few weeks. Now.

Stay awake to watch. The kingdom is coming. It's here. Can we see? It's here! Right here.