

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



NOVEMBER 19, 2023

## USURY

*the enemy of trust*

by Drew Downs

Given how much our world is dependent on credit, we have clearly lost sight of why our tradition has a long prohibition on charging interest. Yes, we oppose the idea and then condone it literally everywhere. But, because we understand it is how the world works now, we can't conceive of another world. Like, say, the Kingdom of Heaven, perhaps.

The problem our faith tradition has is not with an amazing 2.9% fixed interest rate so much

as how we can't *really* draw the line between good interest and bad. And we write lending laws to entrap the borrowers in debt, placing generous moral responsibility on the lenders and irresponsible motives on borrowers. In short, we struggle to see modern lending the way Jesus does: as exploitative.

Perhaps the idea of being worthy of another's trust is not merely one's ability to pay far more than one borrowed.

# ORDINARY TIME

2023

## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

### **Rooted in Abundance**

This year's stewardship campaign theme is "Rooted in Abundance," a theme which seems particularly timely.

The experience of early 2020 was sudden and dramatic. What happened right at the start of the pandemic? A toilet paper shortage. Right at the moment we were invited into common struggle, we had people literally fighting over rolls of TP. As much as we are people of abundance, what we saw with our eyes and felt in our hearts was scarcity.

It almost doesn't matter that the scarcity would be momentary. Or, in a greater sense, illusory (remember how people discovered bidets?). That feeling of constriction and fear mixed with existential dread to form a toxic cocktail we might call We're Never Gonna Make It Through.

I bring this up because we did make it through. And in spite of supply chain problems and corporate opportunism, we are still here, doing the work of Christ in our community. Our very real challenges may be colored by illusions of scarcity, but our faith is indeed rooted in abundance. That God's work needs doing. And we are uniquely called to do *our* work.

I encourage you to enter into this thanks giving season with joy, faith, and hope. That our work in this neighborhood is plentiful, our gifts are bountiful, and that what we offer is necessary and effectual. And all of it comes from the foundation of Christ's love for us and faith in us. May we be as generous as the one who gives us everything.

With love,  
Drew

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Proper 28A*

November 19, 2023

### **Collect**

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus said, "It is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man,

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reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

## Reflection

For Jesus's final dark parable, he unleashes a story of trust, investment, and huge profits. For the reader, this all hinges on our familiarity with usury—profiting immensely *and immorally*—and how much God commands us *not* to exploit other people for massive profit.

In a sense, this is like the modern cautionary tale; think *Wall Street*. And like these more modern stories, the reader is being shown what they know is wrong and invited to deal with it. To find sympathy with those whom the bad guy rejects. And to encounter the suffering as not *only* morally wrong, but unjust. Like punishing someone for returning to them their own stuff.

What we do *after* the cautionary tale is on us. But it does serve as a helpful key for investigating our world. For exploitation schemes, from bankers to slavers, and for influences that predicate trust on how much we can get from someone else's labor. Observing what not to do often helps point us in the right direction.

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