

**ENTER THE KINGDOM
BLC – B. HULL SOMERS – 10.14.18**

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15, Hebrews 4:12-16, Mark 10:17-31

I preached this text for the first time as a new preacher in one of my first assignments. I was twenty seven years old with a new master of divinity degree under my arm and vehement excitement about the Kingdom of God.

I guess I preached it pretty directly because at the end of the service an older gentleman, who was always dressed debonairly with hair perfectly slicked back, pointed to the parking lot where his brand new powder blue convertible sat and he laughingly said, “I suppose you think I should sell that, give the money to the poor and come back next week in some old jalopy *har har har?!*” I smiled back with all the moxie of a new pastor and said, “Why not?” His guffawing turned into a grimace and awkward chuckle as he shuffled out the door of the sanctuary into the narthex. The next Sunday he pulled up with the convertible and a new suit.

This is how most of us respond to these texts – with discomfort and awkward laughter as we drive off into the sunset. We tend to take stories like this as one dimensional – if Jesus encouraged the rich young ruler to sell everything that we need to or, alternatively, that if we are not rich then we do not have to sacrifice anything. Both polarities miss the mark, as polarities typically do.

Most of us do not consider ourselves rich; after all we are not the 1% holding the more wealth than the rest of the world combined. We are not in the league of Bill Gates or Steve Jobs or Warren Buffet.

But by the world's standards, most of us are rich. If we have clean underwear and socks on right now, if we have eaten today, if we have access to clean water where we live we are considered rich by global standards.

This Scripture is both a prophetic counterpoint to institutional and systemic injustice that somehow allows and encourages huge and deadly discrepancies of wealth, power and resources in our world AND it is also an invitation to all of us to let go of what enslaves us and embrace the way of Jesus.

The Amos text is an important key as we look at the ways we are captive to the world.

The prophet speaks in this message to the descendants of Joseph about their treatment of the poor and their negligence in helping their neighbor. It is not very often that we see the sons of Joseph called out in the Biblical canon – most often we hear the terminology the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob so this is something to pay attention to. Joseph, if you recall, was a son of Jacob – the youngest and favorite son with the famously colorful coat which made his brothers so angry and jealous that they plotted to fake his death and have him sold into slavery. They did, covering his beautiful coat in blood and concocting a tragic story to tell their father.

Joseph ended up as a personal slave to the pharaoh and worked his way up in the household through his loyalty, intelligence and ability to interpret dreams.

Because of his position of power with the pharaoh, Joseph was crucial to the survival of not only the folk that enslaved him but of his own family as God gave him dreams warning of a coming famine. For several years before the famine he arranged to store food to prepare, and it kept many alive that would have perished. When his brothers came to him during the famine,

starving and needing help, in an amazing demonstration of grace and mercy, he helped them and forgave them.

But this mercy and forgiveness had an unforeseen underbelly. As Joseph and his brothers and their families became more and more comfortable in the land of Egypt, they actually enslaved themselves and their descendants.

In their comfort, they stayed in Egypt past the time of the famine; they relinquished their property and their belongings so that they could continue enjoy their standard of living; they gave up their freedoms one by one.

They became so entrenched that when the good pharaoh died and in his place came a bad pharaoh, the friends and family of Joseph went from being protected and cared for to enslaved and dehumanized.

So for Amos to warn folk who were “descendants of Joseph” in our Old Testament text, was to remind folk of what it looks like when comfort invites us into slavery.

What Jesus spoke into that young man was not a dis of anyone who is rich, but a challenge to let go of the things that keep ourselves and others in bondage.

Most of us enjoy comfortable lives.

Could we also be enslaved? Could we also have sunk into bondage through the temptations of comfort? Could we, in our slavery to comfort, be oppressing others or, at the very least, failing to do the good that we are able to for those who are in need?

This Scripture is not as much about what we own as what owns us. What is it in our lives that we choose over pursuing justice, mercy and service? What is it that, if we were asked to give it up to follow Jesus, we too would walk dejectedly away...chuckling awkwardly to cover

for our conviction? What has such a powerful grip on our lives that it causes us to ignore the humanity in our neighbors?

To truly follow Jesus would be to honor the reflection of God in everyone and everything that we encountered. It would be to recognize the audacity of putting any “thing” over the healing of the world. This world is on loan to us from our grandchildren and great-grandchildren and yet we continue to ignore global warning; not think about the countless people being trafficked for sex right under our noses; consider the injustice and inequality and hatred in our world as not our problem as wars rage on decades and lifetimes.

And these are just a few ways we choose incremental enslavement to the healing of the world. There are countless other ways and almost as many ways to ignore and choose comfort as there are diverse and different personalities. What’s your poison?

I do not know if you are rich or not and I could care less if you sold your powder blue convertible to give money to the poor – but I do care about what enslaves you.

I do pray that the Spirit of God would convict your heart about the comforts that keep you quiet, keep you from rocking the boat, keep you from your own healing, keep you from seeing the image of God in disturbing disguise, keep you from freedom in Christ.

Rick Hoker writes, “It’s not just that God dwells inside you, but God is at the center of your spiritual makeup, an integral and enduring part of who you are. God is not added to you, but you are added to God. God is the foundation onto which your soul is built. Everyone you meet is also a God-particle wrapped in a soul.”

What an incredible revelation. God is everywhere and in everyone. Already, always with us. Jesus did not send that young man packing without grace – Jesus challenged the young man

to let go of what was standing in the way of his experience of the grace that had already been given to him.

The young man's story did not end there. The text is unresolved, but his destiny was not...he belonged to God and Jesus looked at him, loved him, and invited him to experience that FACT in a deeper way.

Jesus invites us this morning, just as he invited the rich young man in our Gospel, to let everything go so that we might enjoy the wonder and leadership of God. Let how we define ourselves, our best laid plans, our possessions, our futures, let it all go into the amazing flow of God's love. Letting go of what we thought we knew to appreciate truths we had never dreamed of. Entrusting our lives to God and watching as we are set free from our bondage and embraced into eternal life that starts right now with the endless possibilities of God's love. Amen.

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