

We've been talking about equality—Black Lives Matter and equality of women with men  
Maybe 10 years ago I attended a conversation with a diverse group of people in Seattle

Question posed to the group—who is the most marginalized group in society today?

Who suffers as the most oppressed people group?

Going I anticipated that the answer would be about the LGBT people

To my surprise, the strong conviction was: the poor

Particularly the way the poor were kept poor by our systemic oppression

When we talk about the poor, I often hear this verse, which quotes Jesus saying...

*For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. Matthew 26:11 NRSV*

As if to say, yes, poverty is a problem, but we just have to live with it

This misses the point—

A woman used a very costly alabaster jar of ointment to anoint Jesus

The disciples were angry about the waste and said the money would better feed poor

Jesus is honoring the woman's good service, not making a statement on poverty

This idea of living with poor as a normal part of society is in contrast to God's System...

God's Jubilee system in Leviticus 25

In 49 years the land would be returned to the original owners

That way no one family could amass great wealth and land

at the permanent expense of others leaving them with nothing

Jubilee—Work 6 days and rest on the 7<sup>th</sup>

Work 6 years and take a sabbatical year (colleges and universities)

Jubilee year after a "week" of sabbatical years or 49 years

During the sabbatical or Sabbath years

1. Land was given a vacation—nothing planted  
volunteer plants left for the poor
2. Year of respite in an agricultural society
3. Debts forgiven

Jubilee year

1. Slaves were released  
most slaves were those who could not pay off their debts
2. Debts were erased  
most debts were charitable loans to needy persons  
They could not charge interest to other Hebrews
3. Land itself was returned to the original occupants 49 years ago  
Maintained the original pattern of land ownership  
given when the 12 tribes settled the Promised Land  
Prevented anyone from permanently controlling land  
esp. large amounts at the expense of the poor

The entire heart of God is for equitable distribution of wealth

God reset it all periodically

Inscription on the Liberty Bell: "proclaim liberty throughout the land"

*Quote from Leviticus 25:10 - And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family.*

Designed to promote economic liberty and self-sustenance for all people, no matter how poor

We hear it all the time... the rich get richer and the poor get poorer

We hear it so often that we have no sense of what that really means—no sense inside

Richest 1 % of the US holds 40% of the wealth in our country...

Poverty—14.5% of the US population is “officially” poor

God says this is not justice

God’s heart is for equitable distribution of wealth—the Jubilee system in the Old Testament

In the new covenant there is no mandate of how to equitably distribute the wealth

It could be capitalism, communism, socialism, tribalism, feudalism

Any economic system done fairly must provide for every one

All have their weaknesses or Achilles heel

Capitalism is ok—but we must be careful with the disadvantaged

i.e. if there are always winners and losers...

How do we provide quality of life and sustenance for the loser?

God says be attentive to the *least of these*

God says no to unfair practices

Worker exploitation for profit—human slavery for sex or labor

Immigrant labor—sell kids to go to the US so they can “make it”

Then they are sold to sex and cheap labor

But unfair practices are also “said to be normal business”

Subprime mortgages

Predatory lending

God even said no to charging interest to fellow citizens

Loans were made to help the poor—so they were not allowed interest

Interest was only charged to foreigners—usually in business deals

Poor people pay a higher interest rate

Large grocery stores are not built in poor areas of town

And when they do, the prices are higher

Health insurance—even with the Affordable Health Care Act, not everyone has insurance

And there is huge push back against what we do have

Any kind of health care for every one and we declare it socialism

That stops the conversation so we don’t think rationally beyond that

We must find a way to continue the conversation

Banks know how to cut down on bankruptcy—but they make their money on fees

Our mandate is to make systemic arrangements for the have nots, losers, poor in our society

It was not the job of the temple

Rather this was laid on the whole of society

It is a fallacy that the society can get rich

and the church will care for the poor

We can’t do it

We’re generous—but we don’t have enough money

for all the poor people in the 10 square blocks around the church

God said this must be done through the governance of society

Matthew 25:31-46—Judgment of the **Nations**

We assume this is a personal sorting and judgment—but it is nations  
The basis of judgment of the nation is their care for the least of these  
Are you a goat or a sheep?

Our mandate is to make systemic arrangements for the have nots, losers, poor

Credit cards for freshman in college are lucrative for the bank  
But destructive for the student who gives in to the temptation  
We excuse ourselves—saying they should know better  
We blame the people who accepted and used them  
God blames the people who made them so available

Buying cars—the entire system is set up to make you pay as much as they can get  
The more innocent you are—the more you pay  
Quakers were known for fair pricing  
They said a child should be able to go to the store  
and not be taken advantage of  
Before—barter system—Quakers used set prices  
People said it would be their financial demise  
Truth is they prospered  
Need fair pricing in buying cars

Quakers were also known for using fair measurers and weights  
and their honesty of dealings which were binding on the buyer and seller  
Now—"subject to change without notice"  
Corporations hold the power—raising rates at the slightest late payment

The poor—we say anyone can “pull themselves up by their boot straps”  
1800s as an example of an impossible task  
In 1922 it was a metaphor, meaning to better oneself by one's own unaided efforts  
No one knows the real source of this idiom  
But it doesn't make sense  
And it isn't scriptural

Working minimum wage jobs  
It used to be true that you started at the bottom and worked up  
But real upward mobility doesn't happen at McDonalds  
Yes for 1 or 2 but not for very many  
For unskilled people—the primary way to increase income is to work 2 or 3 jobs  
Often these jobs are held at part time with split shifts so there are no benefits  
Better for the employer  
Factory and industry jobs are disappearing—where the unskilled used to work  
Mills, assembly lines, etc.  
Now the majority of unskilled labor is in the service industry  
Service industry has a much lower pay rate  
To work at minimum wage, go to school to improve skills, and raise children  
... is an overwhelming task  
Yes, there are the miracle stories—but one has to be superwoman/man

Our economic system is not built on truth—but on sand

*Children's song about building on sand...*

Our current economic system doesn't wash in God's eyes

AND it doesn't work

We are living the consequences of business that is not done in truth

Yes—we will always have the poor with us because our economic systems hold them down

Where do we go from here? Repentance

O God—we are sorry

Turn around and get our "house" in order

If I have wronged someone—fix it

If I have held to a wrong philosophy—change it

If I borrowed beyond my ability—repent, change and work to set finances straight

If I said the poor can help themselves and judged them unfairly—change what I say

Recognize and admit my prejudices against the poor

God's economic system is Jubilee—

From Leviticus 25:10 - ... *you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants...*