



## *Generosity: Motivated by Love*

*Luke 16:19-31*

*'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'* "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

*September 25, 2016*

## **Thoughts for the Week**

Scriptures: Amos 8:4-7 • 1 Timothy 2:1-8 • Luke 16:1-13

From my many years of listening and "reading" people it is my opinion that one of the things Christians do not like to hear spoken of from the pulpit of their church is money or riches. For what it's worth, my sense is that most pastors or ministers themselves do not like to speak about money or riches from the pulpit. None-the-less, if the pulpit is the place from which scripture is proclaimed, we have a ready-made example of some speakers in our past history who have spoken boldly about this subject.

If we can assume that the words of scripture are meant not only for the assembly but for the preacher as well, I must admit that there are some passages that make me a little nervous when I read them. That happens to be particularly true on this Sunday.

The first preacher is Amos, the prophet. When you hear his words you may want to say: "I hope he never comes to our pulpit!" Amos seemingly knew full well the scandalous trade practices that were current in his time:

*"When will the Sabbath end, so that we can go back to selling our grain?"* □ *"Let us sell the chaff of the wheat for whatever it is worth; let us adjust the scales to increase the price of our produce."*

To that scandalous practice, Amos declares: *"You are buying the poor person for the price of a pair of sandals. You take advantage of those who have no control of the prices of the produce they need to live on."* Isn't it odd that economics has changed so little over the centuries?

In Luke's gospel we hear Jesus' story of a steward who cheated the owner of the land by cutting prices, all in order to curry favor with his friends. Oddly, Jesus praises the steward for his worldly cleverness to make friends. Some day, however, such practices will catch up on you and you will end up being the loser anyway.

The lesson that arises in both these scriptures is the issue of control, money and power; problems that are so clearly evident in the politics and business of our country today.

But even among those of us who steer clear of the money and power issues, we may still occasionally ask ourselves how we hold precious what we personally own: money, automobiles, home(s), clothing, insurance policies, position and our name in the community, et cetera. Most of us would probably say

that these things do not own us, but it is still worthwhile to ask if they have some influence over the way we see ourselves in the world today.

Here is a quote from Basil the Great, 3rd century bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, which could easily provide some thought if preached from American pulpits today:

*“When someone steals another’s clothes we call him a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes; the money which you hoard up belongs to the poor.”*

I have never actually used that quote before this writing, but now I am beginning to wonder why. Perhaps I am afraid that it may reflect badly on my own life. The great power of scripture is that it makes the preacher and the assembly, think once again about life in Twenty First Century America. If we are made to blush a little, well perhaps the word of God has had its way.

*Happy Birthday – Audrey (9/30)*

## Generosity Motivated

“But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, “Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you after he said, ‘The Lord your God will give you rest by giving you this land.’” - Joshua 1:12-13

A group of Israelites approached Moses asking for a favor (see Numbers 23). They had huge herds and had found good grazing land for them. They wanted to settle down on this good land. There was just one catch: the land was east of the Jordan. But they asked Moses if they could make this their permanent home anyway.

The day rapidly approached when the Lord would lead his people across the Jordan River and into the land he had promised them. The people would have to struggle to establish a foothold in this new land. Wars would be fought. Every warrior would be needed to take this new territory.

The request to settle down east of the Jordan carried huge implications for the rest of the community. What would Moses decide?

At first, he seemed inclined to reject their request. He called them a “brood of sinners” just for asking. But the people circled back to him and made a counter-proposal: could they settle in the land if they committed to send warriors with the rest of the community when Israel crossed the Jordan? Moses once again considered their request.

Moses’ seems hesitant about this arrangement. He’d been burned before by people who didn’t keep their word. Would they really join the fight when they’re needed? The safest course would be to deny their request. But Moses knew the character of the Lord. He knew the Lord’s generosity and kindness. And he knew that this accommodation could work if the people would keep their commitments.

In today’s passage, Joshua prepares to call in those commitments. He’s going to tell them that it’s time to fight. But before Joshua calls on them to their duty, he reminds them of God’s generosity. The Lord gave them rest. They’ve enjoyed the land and God’s kindness. God’s generosity forms the basis for their obedience to him.

The same is true for us. God’s generosity toward us motivates our obedience to him. He’s given us life and breath and every good thing we’ve ever seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched. He’s given his own life for us, dying on the cross to free us from our captivity to sin. He’s given us his very Spirit so we need never go a day without his presence or his power.