

Sermon – More than Enough
Scripture Readings: Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15, Luke 16:19-31
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Our first scripture reading, Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15, is the most detailed business transaction in Scripture. The prophet Jeremiah is asked to purchase a plot of land which is worthless because of the occupation of the Babylonian army. The prophet values the ancient “law of redemption,” which he is fulfilling by buying the land. The law states that if a family member falls into jeopardy, it is the duty of the patriarch to provide for that person. In this act, Jeremiah reflects his confidence in the God who provides more than enough. Listen to what the Spirit is saying.

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. 2 At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, 3 where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, "Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the Lord: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it;

6 Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: 7 Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours." 8 Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. 9 And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. 10 I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. 11 Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; 12 and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. 13 In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, 14 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. 15 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

Time and time again, throughout history, we have witnessed men and women of faith do their part, being faithful to both ancient Hebrew law and the teachings of Christ. In today’s second scripture reading, Luke 16:19-31, Jesus shares a parable about a man who lost sight of his responsibility to the poor. This is the word of God

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

23 In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 24 He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." 25 But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." 27 He said, "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment." 29 Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." 30 He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." 31 He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." "

The title of the sermon: More than Enough

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, thank you for providing more than enough within this community of faith. And now, may the words of my mouth and meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

What a great theme for our 2017 Stewardship Campaign: More than Enough! Not only does it remind us of God's generous, reliable, and steadfast love in our lives as we honor our 50 and 60 year members, it is also an affirmation of what we can do together when we collaborate our resources and talents.

Additionally, the theme offers us insight into ourselves and the world in which we live. Too often we are dissatisfied with our place in creation. We want more! Cultural messages play into our dissatisfaction, encouraging us to believe "enough" is just out of reach, and that we need to keep striving for it, consuming it, and purchasing it. It is an ancient dilemma. Our biblical story of creation puts it simply...and the man and the woman ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because they wanted to be like God. Leo Tolstoy wrote a short story in 1886 called "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" It is the story of one who purchases a small track of land. The harvest is good. His debts are paid. He is content. Soon he yearns for more and more land; however, he spends a lifetime chasing after the more without fulfillment.

The good news is that God's "more than enough" is not an invitation to indulge in "more, bigger, better." Instead God's abundance gives us the insight and freedom to push ourselves away from the table (literally and figuratively) and to say "Thank you very much. I have had more than enough!"

Jeremiah's purchase of property that has no intrinsic value symbolizes a down payment on tomorrow for the captive people of Israel. The purchase of this unworkable land is an act of charity toward his nephew but it is even more than that. It is a symbolic act of faith that their future is held in the hands of the God who provides more than enough. In this detailed business transaction an ancient prophet reveals the character of God who invests time and time again in our lives, who forgives, who rebuilds, who recovers, who brings good out of evil and life out of death. This is who God is and this is who God calls us to be...people with more than enough who understand the importance of investing in one another's lives.

If Jeremiah reminds us of the importance of making investments in the future; Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man reminds us that our investments must reach beyond ourselves. Dr. Amy-Jill Levine puts this parable in context for us.

Judaism of that period would likely conclude that the miserable condition of Lazarus was the result of God's punishment for sin, and wealth, such as enjoyed by the rich man indicated God's blessings. Jesus' audience would have been steeped in the belief that riches were a blessing for obedience, with suffering a punishment for sin. (pg. 270, Short Stories by Jesus)

Jesus tells this parable to turn this belief upside down and expose it for what it is. Jesus tells this story because a poor beggar in the bosom of Abraham was unimaginable. Jesus doesn't believe that all the rich are good and all the poor are evil any more than he believes that all the wealthy are going to hell and all the poor will end up in the bosom of Abraham.

Surely life is not that simple and we must be careful not to interpret this beautifully crafted story too simplistically or we will lose the richness of the symbolism Christ has invested in it.

Unlike the rich man in Luke's parable, men and women of faith understand that the hoarding of wealth is in violation with the Law of Moses, which specifically required that the harvest be shared with the poor and the sojourner, the stranger within their gates. Ironically, the field that Jeremiah purchased for seventeen silver shekels almost 600 years before Christ, later became a burial place for foreigners. It was a way for Judaism to take care of the sojourner, the stranger within their gates.

Unlike the rich man in Luke's parable, men and women of faith understand that the teachings of Christ give us specific responsibilities to the poor. *Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you?*

One of the details in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus which is particularly striking is that all those years Lazarus sat right outside his gate, the rich man never saw him. The tragic irony is that even when the rich man sees Lazarus for the first time in the bosom of Abraham, he still sees him only as someone to serve his needs. "Send Lazarus to ease my thirst." And later in the story when the rich man thinks about someone other than himself for the first time and wants to help his brothers, Lazarus again is his errand boy. There is a reason Lazarus is the only character in the parable given a name. Luke wants us to see the one who has become invisible in our society as a child of God.

Kathryn Stockett wrote *The Help* in 2009, which explores relationships among women in the south during the 1960's and the lines that defined their town and their times. Sadly, the black maids who raised the children of the white families were often invisible. Minny and Aibileen are talking in Aibileen's kitchen about the lines between black and white, rich and poor, men and women. They decide it's something some folks made up a long time ago that may not be real but is still very much a part of their world...and ours.

My friends, we cannot solve all the inequities and injustices of the world in which we live. Inequities and injustices which are visible in those who hold cardboard signs on the street corners of Springfield or in those who walk the streets of Charlotte in protest. We do not presume to know all the facts or circumstances in these persons' lives. Let us resist the temptation to ease our own

discomfort by judging or rationalizing their suffering as if they deserve their circumstances. These children of God have already had more than enough contempt.

However, by investing in the ministries of Westminster Presbyterian Church and participating in service opportunities, we have more than enough occasions to do our part, to feed, to mentor, to build, to plant, and to welcome. Let us pray for our world and let us give as a faith community. We give because we have more than enough and by giving, we become a part of God's help in ages past, God's hope for years to come. Amen.