

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Mother of us all.

I have always been skeptical of Christian mission work. So, when I came to St. Paul and the Redeemer almost 10 years ago, I remember sitting down in the rector's office and, in the overconfident way that only a seminarian can, I basically said, "Tell me why this Haiti ministry is theologically sound." Grappling with my own baggage, I was searching for a new way to understand justice ministries of the church. Ministries that pushed back against the us versus them practices of so many international missions that came before us. The rector's response was simple. "Come and see." So, six months later I boarded a flight to Port-au-Prince with a group of SPR parishioners with absolutely no idea what I was getting myself into. What I saw and experienced on that trip changed the way that I thought about justice work in the church and how we show up in the world with our neighbors in Christ.

Today we gather together to celebrate and bolster the relationship between St. Paul and the Redeemer and the people of St. Patrick's Episcopal Church in Tom Gateau, Haiti. A bi-directional relationship that has impacted the lives of these communities for decades and changed the trajectory of what is possible in this world for everyone involved, ourselves included. St. Paul and the Redeemer has financially supported programs identified by the people of Tom Gateau as valued and needed. Since 2015, funds collected on Haiti Sunday have supported a lunch program that feeds the over 160 students of St. Patrick's and employs the women of Tom Gateau who serve it. We also come together every Lent to provide monetary support that pays the teachers' salaries, providing the opportunity for these talented and dedicated educators to continue to strengthen and grow the young minds of this community. And in the spirit of SPR's love of vibrant and diverse musical offerings, one of the teachers supported through this program is a gifted music teacher and band director. (If you haven't already done so, you really should watch the video on SPR's website of the St. Patrick's band.)

And as I'm sure you have already seen coming, today we are asking for your continued support of this ministry. To give generously so that our relationship with St. Patrick's may be sustained and grow.

So, it is only fitting that our lectionary provided us with scripture for this day all about money, or so it seems. We start off with the first letter to Timothy, a letter supposedly written by Paul (although few will argue that) to his friend and fellow teacher. The beginning of the section that we read today will make many of our constitutions forged in capitalist ideals a little uncomfortable. "There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it...but those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." At first glance, we could very easily go black and white. Money bad. God good. But like much of this sacred text, it's not so easy. We are grappling. Because after the interlude expounding on the righteousness and love of God, we get to Paul's answer to the wealthy. He doesn't say burn it all down, give it all away, wear sackcloth and beg in the marketplace. What he says is don't let that money get in the way. Do not allow for the pursuit of money, capital, stuff, to turn people into objects that can be acquired and discarded just as easily. It is not about money as good or bad. It's about where you place your value.

And with that, we arrive at the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Although right in front of him for what seems to be years, the rich man never truly sees Lazarus. Who knows if words were ever exchanged or if a second thought ever passed the mind of the nameless man of wealth entering his gate. From where the story goes, we can infer that human decency was scarce, for Lazarus dies and spends his afterlife in the company of Abraham and we find the rich man sweltering in Hades. If we thought we understood the problem based on the way these men lived their lives, it is really hammered home after death. Glimpsing Abraham and Lazarus in the

distance, the rich man confirms how he sees, or in fact doesn't see, Lazarus as he calls out to Abraham. His requests of Abraham are to make Lazarus do his bidding. First, he begs for Abraham to make Lazarus come bring him some water, to which Abraham responds, Nope. Then the rich man says, okay fine but please have Lazarus go warn my family so they don't end up here like me. Again, Abraham replies with a resounding, not gonna happen. Even in death, the rich man never sees Lazarus as fully human, but rather as an object to be stepped over or moved around in service to his whims. The rich man isn't bad because he's rich. The rich man is blinded by his pursuit of wealth and power and has lost the ability to see Lazarus as fully, valuably human.

Our readings today are not warnings against wealth, but rather a stern reminder that where our treasure is there our hearts will be also, so pay attention to your treasure. Paul Tillich, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theologian and University of Chicago scholar, understands god not as an ethereal being, but rather as the thing which humans ultimately are concerned with the most. That all-consuming thing becomes our god. Be it money, power, or our heavenly creator. Luther says it this way: To have a God is simply to trust and believe in one with our whole heart... Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God.

Our scripture today is a reminder of this human tendency and a calling back toward the God who loves us ultimately. A calling away from the trappings of this life, the human made capitalistic structures that tell us there is never enough, that there is a scarcity of every resource and we must hoard from our brothers and sisters in order to protect our own hides. That story that we created out of fear and consistently use against our neighbors flies in the face of everything our God is about. Our God of abundance who turned water into wine and fed thousands with a simple loaf of bread and a few fishes. Our God who commanded us to love our neighbors and then came to walk among us to show us how. When we prioritize the material goods of this life for our own stockpiles, we turn each other into just another object and ultimately separate ourselves from the call of God telling us that the point of all of this is to Love One Another. That's it. Love is our ultimate concern.

Which is actually what makes this scripture so fitting for Haiti Sunday. A day when we spend time thinking and praying about how we as a community are in relationship with our brothers and sisters in Tom Gateau and a day when we pool our resources to support the flourishing of those we love. I encourage you today not just to give, although I want you to do that too, but also to learn, grow deeper in understanding our relationship with St. Patrick's and why the work of this ministry, the school lunches, the teacher's salaries, the music program have a deep impact on the lives this community. Let us join together in celebrating this ministry, seeing our neighbors at St. Patrick's, valuing the work that they do to nurture their community, and coming alongside them to build the kingdom of God.

Amen.