

Sermon: 2021/01/31 (4th Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B) - *Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28_BTR*

[Invite children to the front]

Kids' Talk: Knowledge vs. Love

[Monopoly money.]

What's an easy way of measuring what we value in America?
(What Americans think is *important*.)
I'll tell you: How much a person is *paid*.

[Divide the money out, but VERY unevenly -]

Footballer.
Teacher.
Mum.

One quality we often think very highly of is 'knowledge' - *being clever*.
And we will often be rude about people who we think are "simple."
Well, Paul, speaking for God, says having some knowledge might be a good thing, yes, but a person who is *loving* is far better.

Let's pray:
Lord God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

On "Equity"

[Lego - 2 x (plain) "minifigs," a fence and an even number of bricks of the same colour.]

Everyone is talking about "*equity*."
Have you noticed that?
It's "on" lots of people's "lips" -
Plucked from obscurity, the term suddenly started to appear widely on placards at protests and political rallies in recent years.
And this new administration seem very keen on bandying the word about.

It has even shown up in recent (presidential) "executive orders."
Like some sort of "holy grail" of politics.
It almost has a magic power:
our elites - in Washington and in the Academy - seem seduced by it.
It is their greatest prize - the thing they say that we should *passionately* care about.
The thing we should all be agitating for.
So, what is it?

Well, "equity" is a theory of justice.
It concerns the distribution of "goods."
These goods might be jobs.
They might be money.
They might be doctorates.
Cabinet positions.
Or beautiful wives.
And a call or *appeal* for "equity" is a call for those goods to be *evenly* shared out; that is to say - "shared out" so that there is *no* difference between how much each person (in the same system) *possesses* of the good in question.
Equity 'means we all end up at the same place'.[\[n.1\]](#)

Now, this is very much at odds with how most Americans have thought of what justice looks like in a society, which has largely concerned itself with removing *barriers* to "goods."
And then "letting the chips fall where they may."
Just as long as everyone has *access* (to the goods they seek).
If Ben Randall - an Anglican minister - ends up with a little less than...Jeff Bezos, say - the billionaire owner of Amazon, that's not an injustice (traditionally speaking).
The injustice would be only if that outcome was a consequence of *his* placing impediments to *my* having *the same* as him.
And if he didn't do that - if I *wasn't* hindered *by others* in my striving for "goods" and yet those others gained more than me, then that "more" can even be celebrated.
But not according to "equity."

But what does God think?
(About "equity.")
After all, the Psalmist reminded us this morning that God is '*all*' about 'faithfulness and justice': [\[Ps. 111:7\]](#);
that *all* the 'works' of His hands are these things *exclusively*.
Does God, therefore, view justice as everyone *having* exactly the same goods?
Irrespective of effort.

Is God's expectation of a *just* ordering here on Earth one in which we - and specifically, *the government* - continually - *and aggressively* - rearrange "goods" so that no one person has more than anyone else? [Pause.]

To find out if "equity" is God's idea of justice, the easiest thing to do - the "shortcut" - is to look at *Jesus*: [Col. 1:15].

Why?

Well, if my saying that Jesus is the *infallible* Creator Himself in human flesh isn't enough for you, consider that, in our Old Testament reading from *Deuteronomy*, Moses says there's going to be a final "prophet" of *unequaled* authority. - Whose teaching; whose insight; whose theology or *philosophy* (of, for example, "justice") - will be *definitive*: [Deut. 18:18].

And we see in our gospel this morning that this individual is, as you'll have guessed, *Christ*:

Look(!), 'even the unclean spirits...obey[ed] Him.' [Mk. 1:27]

Ok, so what, then, does Jesus have to say about "equity"?

That's the question, right?

Biden, for example, is a committed Roman Catholic after all; *a Christian* - so, presumably, he must think Jesus had a lot to say about how the Church should desire "equity," right?

Wrong.

Jesus spent His *entire* time down here with us in an *extremely* inequitable place - the Roman Empire - and never once ordered anyone to share out their belongings to eliminate disparities *for the sake of eliminating disparity*.

And there were *enormous* differences between what men like Pontius Pilate, and the High Priest Caiaphas enjoyed in that place at that time, and what the general masses owned:

'Poverty was widespread...[and] overwhelming'. [n.2]

Almost *half* the population, it is estimated (by historians), lived "hand-to-mouth." Things were *sooo(!)* bad in Galilee especially, where Jesus was from, 'that almost no remains of storage buildings for grain or other products have been found in archaeological excavations...and no shops at all. The Galileans seem to have consumed all they produced. Having paid the rents, taxes, loan remissions and interests there simply was nothing left to trade with.' [n.3]

(No surplus that remained from one (growing) season to the next.)

Meanwhile, in the "handful" of cities that existed in the "Classical World" - whose names we know so well: Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, Corinth, Pompeii, etcetera - there were men and women - like those aforementioned - who had *fabulously* decadent, easy lifestyles.

Just a few hundred families - most of whom lived in the imperial capital, of course - accounted for about 20 percent of the Empire's *entire* GDP. [n.4]

- an empire of 60 million people:

the wealth of any of those (few) Senatorial and Equestrian families was certainly comparable to that of an Elon Musk or a Bill Gates.

Marcus Crassus, for example, 'a real estate speculator' [n.5], was sooo(!) rich he *personally* hired and salaried an army of 30,000 legionaries to fight the rebel slave-army leader, "Spartacus." [n.6]

In other words, ancient Rome was a close approximation of modern America.

A place *deeply* divided by the "haves" and the "have-nots."

A place of wealth extremes.

And this fact goes unmentioned upon by the Savior:

in *none* of His sermons or lectures did He condemn the lack of "equity," which was everywhere obvious (around Him).

Nowhere did He preach or teach that a situation of uneven (material) good-distribution was *a priori*, intrinsically immoral.

("A *priori*" means, basically, "in and of itself.")

But it *is* clear that He cared about the distribution of "goods" *as an aspect* of justice.

He commands us to confront dire need with charity - charity that is *restorative*.

(To a fundamental degree.)

If I have no home; if I live in a tent or my car, throwing some pocket-change in the paper-cup I hold out is *less* than *Christian* charity;

which is to say, *less* than the Bible's vision of the justice expected of God's people.

"Restorative justice" would see that beggar having again what is needed to live a distinctively *human* life.

"Restorative" justice is what we see in the parable of the "Good Samaritan," and what we see is that the pilgrim on the road who is robbed and brutally beaten by highwaymen; 'stripped' of his clothes and left 'half dead' [Lk. 10:30] doesn't receive just *some* assistance, like a single bandage for one of the *many* wounds suffered.

Christian justice, indicated Jesus, was that that Samaritan stranger did *everything* in his power to see that the pilgrim became healthy, whole and able to resume his journey.

So Jesus *does* make it clear that He expects of *extraordinary* generosity from among His followers.

And we've so *abysmally* failed to do what He asks that we've created a big, black hole of deprivation) in this nation.

And a big, black hole as to its possible solutions.

And *this* is why "the nation" is looking for another *answer* to meet the needs of its poor (than the Gospel).

- Because we Christians can't be relied upon to do as the Lord asked.

This is why more and more are turning to the Quixotic goal of "equity."

That's on us.

Which returns us to last week's sermon about how we are to blame - the Church's inadequate charity, over *many* generations, has created this situation.

In conclusion - to reiterate: does God care that I might have more of any good than you?

No.

Unless, that is, I came by my "more" by a meanness of spirit.

Unless I acquired my "more" because I looked away when I saw a hand held out for help.

Unless my "more" is (knowingly) *predicated* on your having less of the same "goods" than me.

- because if it is, *that* is something I need to confess.

That is something I need to change.

That is something I will regret on Judgement Day.

Thank God for His mercy- 'it endureth forever' [Ps. 118:29 (K. J. V.)] - it is a bottomless cistern of love: [Jn. 4:13f].

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, amen.

Footnotes:

1. See, e.g.: Jacobs, Emily (2nd of November, 2020), 'Kamala Harris' 'equality of outcome' Video Slammed as Communism Pitch', *The New York Post*, available at <https://nypost.com/2020/11/02/harris-equality-of-outcome-video-slammed-as-communism-pitch/>, (accessed January 26, 2021).
2. Häkkinen, Sakari (2016), Poverty in the First-Century Galilee', *HTS Teologiese Studies*, Volume 72, No. 4, available at <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3398>, 3 of 9.
3. *Ibid.*, 7 of 9.
4. See: Scheidel, Walter and Friesen, Steven J. (2009), 'The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Volume 99, pp. 61-91.
5. Carlen, Joe (2016), *A Brief History of Entrepreneurship: The Pioneers, Profiteers, and Racketeers Who Shaped Our World*, New York, N. Y.: Columbia University Press, 67.
6. Strauss, Barry (2009), *The Spartacus War*, New York, N. Y.: Simon & Schuster, 119-123.