

# The Revolution of God's Economy

*A sermon at Holy Eucharist on Proper 19C, 2025*

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*Almsgiving in the kingdom of God is more than transactional charity. Jesus calls his followers to begin living in the kingdom where charity means a radical re-organizing of how resources are gathered and shared, tending to the needs of each without regard for their ability to contribute. This trust in God's abundance is a tall order for 21st century Canadians.*

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## THE POWERFUL ON THEIR THRONES

We are living in a period of uncertainties. The relationships of the great nations of our world are being stretched to points of enormous tension. We see greater evidence every season of the climate crisis all around us. Most people in Canada are deeply concerned about their wellbeing today and into the future. Even when we are not actively thinking about floods, droughts, wildfires, trade wars, and rapidly growing authoritarian movements, we are confronted with their consequences. The gap between the wealthiest and the poor is greater than at any other time in human history. Not only in the sense of price tags, the cost of living rises every single day, while the capacity of the average person to meet that cost does not change.

We live in one of the wealthiest societies that has ever existed. Even if our access is rapidly eroding, most days we can still avail ourselves of more and better quality food, water, medicine, education, and shelter than any of our ancestors. Our capacity to meet our needs and produce abundant excess has been harnessed by a few to make themselves wealthy and to create a superficial status in which the rest of us are meant to be in awe. Collectively, we have forgotten who makes the abundance of our lives available. We have persuaded ourselves that it is our own doing and that we have created this world of plenty through our own might, wit, and ability.

God knows that humans are prone to this sort of pride and warns, again and again, that we must not lose sight of God as the source of these many blessings. When we replace God with ourselves, destruction is sure to follow. We have heard Isaiah's warning in today's readings and

would do well to remember the oft-repeated concern about humanity's pride in Deuteronomy.<sup>1</sup>

When we believe that we are responsible for the abundance in our lives, we begin to feel the weight of that responsibility. We become anxious about whether next year's crop will be sufficient. What if the weather is poor? For all of our might and cleverness, we still have not managed to force the rain to come and go on the days that we would like. This anxiety about scarcity, even in the face of tremendous abundance, causes us to hoard. We begin to collect more food than we could possibly eat before it spoils. We live in houses big enough to hold three families. We try to accumulate more and more and more money, even when we have so much that we could not possibly spend it all before we die. We become like living, flesh and blood versions of the hungry ghosts of Buddhist teaching, always seeking to consume more to fill a hunger that cannot be sated. And in our blind rush to arrange an economy that abets our hoarding and consumption, we forget those with whose care we have been charged in God's kingdom: the orphan, widow, and stranger.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE RICH SENT EMPTY AWAY

When Jesus describes the kingdom of God, there is no ambiguity about how the orphan, widow, and stranger will be cared for. It is crystal clear how the economy of the kingdom of God will function. Equally clear are Jesus' expectations and instructions for his followers who seek to live as citizens of the kingdom of God.

He calls upon his disciples—and those who

would be his disciples—to give up their possessions and distribute all of their money as alms.<sup>3</sup> “Alms” is a wonderful English word that refers to money, goods, or property that have been set aside for the relief of poverty. We might have alms in a fund to give to those in need or an almshouse, a home maintained by the church that those without means to buy or rent their own housing could live in. Jesus is calling upon his followers to give up their possessions and turn over all of the money to be distributed as alms. This seems to have made an impression as we hear in the Acts of the Apostles, “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”<sup>4</sup> No longer are Jesus' followers depending on worn out purses, but are creating a small porthole through which the economy of God's kingdom can be glimpsed.

When we talk about giving for the sake of those who are in need, we tend not to think of alms but of charity. Part of this is how our legal language works, but it is also much more comfortable to think of an abstract concept like charity than it is to consider tangible, material stuff like alms. Especially when we're considering them as something we might give away. Creating a comfortable distance makes sense when we live in a world where we are perpetually anxious about whether we will have enough. But it is a shame, for when we hold our possessions and wealth too tightly, we miss an opportunity to meet God. After all, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. If our treasure is held tightly in our fist, our heart suddenly has little room to grow. Or to beat.

When we give alms and live in charity, there

<sup>1</sup>Deuteronomy 8:11-20; 14:27-29; 31:20; 32:15-18

<sup>2</sup>Deuteronomy 10:17-19

<sup>3</sup>Luke 12:33-34

<sup>4</sup>Acts 2:44-45

is a sacramental quality to life. God is present to both the receiver and the giver; there is a material sign of spiritual grace when we use our gifts, even the material ones, in the way that God hopes we will. Connecting with God does not have to be a long or complex exercise. It can be as simple as helping a neighbour in need.

#### MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD

The charity that Jesus is describing is not the kind of material charity we most often think of in Canada today. Jesus calls his followers to distribute with as alms, but the kingdom he is describing goes beyond this. Here, today, in Canada, we have an economy where the wellbeing, even the survival, of many people who are in need is dependent on the willingness of the very wealthy to occasionally notice their need and condescend to share the scraps from their feast. This kind of transactional charity based on hope in the capricious morality of the extremely rich is not what Jesus is describing.

Jesus is not interested in working in the system we have today. He is not working to shift the scales a little bit this way or that in favour of the poor. Rather, Jesus is calling for a complete reordering of our economy. Jesus describes the kingdom of God as a place where economics are not based on control of land or labour or capital. Rather, Jesus calls for an economy the cornerstone of which is genuine, holy charity. Jesus is describing the world that his mother saw coming into being even before he was born. "[God] has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich

away empty."<sup>5</sup>

The kingdom of God requires radical change from the world we live in today. Almsgiving, or charity, as we know it today is a help to many, but it is not the solution. True charity not only addresses the symptom in our poor, sick, unhoused, lonely neighbour, but destroys the structures that caused their illness, poverty, and isolation in the first place.

The kingdom of God is a radical revolution and its rallying cry has been heard through prophets great and small for generations. Can we, today, take even one or two small steps further into God's kingdom and live in the way Jesus instructs? Moses and the Deuteronomist, Isaiah,<sup>6</sup> Hannah,<sup>7</sup> the apostles, prophets, martyrs, and the Blessed Virgin Mary all believe that we can. Our neighbours in need hope and pray that we can. The kingdom of God is nearer than we think.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Luke 1:51-53

<sup>6</sup>Isaiah 56:6; 58:10

<sup>7</sup>1 Samuel 2:1-10

<sup>8</sup>Luke 17:20-21