

Backed Up by Resurrection

Proper 21, Year C, RCL. Amos 6:1a, 4-7. Psalm 146. I Timothy 6:6-19. Luke 16:19-31. The Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost. September 25, 2016. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

“If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” (Luke 16:31)

The verse I just quoted from today's Gospel reading, Luke 16:31, is among my favorite sentences of Scripture. Jesus, in telling the story of Lazarus the beggar, places this nugget of wisdom in the mouth of Abraham, but any reader of Luke's gospel will know that the reference is to Jesus' own resurrection. The saying captures one of life's great truths: if you are in the habit of ignoring God's signals, the big signal—Jesus' resurrection—will most likely not impress you either.

All our readings today share the theme that material wealth is an unreliable preoccupation over the long haul; developing the habit of paying attention to God and the habit of acting in accordance with God's standards are the only accomplishments that last. They are the wealth that outlasts the changefulness of mortal existence.

It often feels easier and safer not to share our wealth, not just money but time and skill and everything else. Indolence—lying on our couch of ease, as Amos puts it with withering contempt in today's Old Testament

reading—feels good till we realize what didn't get done; if we don't think of that ourselves, God will eventually remind us. And treating the world as a hotbed of insufficiency—there's never enough to go around—seems to make sense. But how do we know, if we don't try to share? That's the message behind the feeding stories in the Gospels—there were not enough loaves and fishes to feed all those people...except there were, when God's urge to share was heeded.

Sloth and gluttony. The lazy side of fearful selfishness and the avaricious side of fearful selfishness. I know them well. Most of us do. God has been at pains to tell us, for thousands of years, that diligence in doing good for others, and not being too tangled up in wealth, power and our appetites, are what he cares most about in terms of right living. But we feel such resistance to doing these good things. What is the motivational secret here?

The first letter of John puts it succinctly: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." (1 John 4:18a) Jesus rose from the dead to demonstrate that God is on the side of going the distance for the good of others—which particularly means other people, but includes the whole of God's creation because God wants to see *everything* in good shape, not just us. Perfect love faces death and says, in the wry saying we use sometimes, "You can kill me but you can't eat me." Evil cannot destroy, deflect or discourage good forever. All attempts to be generous, self-disciplined, caring and hopeful are destined to be raised in Christ. All selfish and apprehensive evasions of generosity

and hope, unless they are confessed and laid at the foot of the cross, will lead to a grimmer conclusion.

So. We are not to fear wealth, but to use it for good. Diligently. And we are to lay our sloth, gluttony and avarice at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ, who will weave our honest regrets, our patient hopes, and our generous delights into a crown that will never fade away.

❖ This is a moderate revision of a sermon preached at the churches of the Shared Ministry on September 28, 2013.