

Mission Reflection

for Pentecost



Seafarers International House

Scripture

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and his children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay his debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me, and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant?’ And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”¹

Message

It’s thought that one talent was worth \$1,000 and one denarii worth twenty cents. So the servant who was ahead \$10 million in forgiven loans, immediately sticks it to his fellow servant for a trifling \$20 and then finds his own debt reinstated, winding up in jail. There is an indelicate adage on Wall Street that “bulls make money, bears make money, but pigs get slaughtered.”

While the gist of this Gospel is forgiveness, there are some lessons here about greed. We live in a capitalist society, and according to Adam Smith, capitalism is an effective economic system because it is predicated on self-interest: “By pursuing his own interest [the individual] frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.”² In modern parlance, this is the “trickle down theory”, although there are academics who disagree and speak instead of a “trickle up theory”.³

In any event, we might interpolate ourselves into the Gospel, imagining the “king” as the really very rich, the “fellow servant” as the really very poor and the “servant” as the rest of us in that amorphous group known as the middle class. And the question put to us is, relative to the multitude of blessings bestowed on us by God, have we ever failed to forgive our “fellow servant” a trifling debt or failed to make a gift to or for the benefit of a “fellow servant” of a trifling amount?

The global economy introduces us to a host of “fellow servants” – garment workers in Bangladeshi sweatshops, immigrant day laborers from Latin America, African rare gem miners and Filipino seafarers. They sew our clothes, they mow our lawns, they unearth our jewelry and they ship 90% of everything we use. We can’t help but know the dire circumstances in which our “fellow servants” exist, in large part for our comfort and benefit. Yet, we “servants” cede very few denarii to them, and for the most part, we do not regard them as our “fellow servants” or neighbors.

In these many weeks of Pentecost, when we focus on the Holy Spirit poured out and upon us, we might ask “What kind of a servants are we – good or wicked? What is our stewardship quotient?” Does our wealth trickle up to ourselves or trickle down to others? Just what kind of servant will we be?

Prayer

Lord, there a multitudes of your children and our fellow servants who suffer and ask for mercy. Help us to hear their cries, to pray with them and to offer mercy and a trifling portion of the many blessings you have showered on us. We ask this fervently, in the name of your Son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. *Matthew 18:23-35*
2. *Adam Smith, THE WEALTH OF NATIONS, Modern Library Edition, 1937, page 423*
3. *Senator Elizabeth Warren, D.Mass., “Wealth Trickles Up”, CNN, June 3, 2014*

Seafarers International House serves seafarers and immigrants with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room guesthouse in Manhattan. The guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It's available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. “Sleep Well By Doing Good.”