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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

September 28, 2025

Proper 21, Year C, Revised Common Lectionary

[Amos 6:1a,4-7](#)

[Psalm 146](#)

[1 Timothy 6:6-19](#)

[Luke 16:19-31](#)

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If you've ever read *The New Yorker*, you know its distinctive one-panel cartoons. There's even a subgenre of St. Peter cartoons: a newly deceased person stands before the Pearly Gates, with St. Peter at his post, and then comes the one-liner. "You've been randomly selected for additional screening." Or, "Welcome! But it's not really heavenly until you've tried our premium option. Would you like to upgrade?" Or, "Remember that one stupid thing you said at a party in your twenties and it kept you up at night for years after? You were right to be concerned."

Of course nobody reads these cartoons for literal information about the afterlife. No one comes away thinking, "I didn't know heaven had an upgrade option!" These cartoons draw on a stock cultural image of the afterlife to make points not about the next life, but about this one.

Our gospel today may be a little like that. Jesus tells a story about a rich man and a poor man, and he places them in a familiar afterlife setting from his own culture: heaven above in Abraham's bosom, Hades below with its torments. And I don't think this parable is meant to give us detailed information about the afterlife either. Rather, Jesus too is using that stock image to make a point about this life: about our responsibility for and to one another; about a world where some feast while others starve; about the spiritual danger of wealth, and the responsibility of each of us to use what we have not for indulgence but for the good of all.

And this week, all three readings converge on that same theme. Amos could be speaking today as he condemns an economic order that channels resources upward and leaves the poor behind, that lets some feast and lounge while the social order collapses: "Alas for those who are at ease, who feast and drink and sing idle songs and are not grieved over the nation's ruin!"

In our second reading Paul writes to Timothy about our individual relationship with money. We're to be content with what we have, to give thanks if we have food and clothing. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And those who do have wealth are to be "rich in good works" by giving it generously, which will gain them a lasting treasure not just in this life but in the life to come. It echoes Jesus' message from last week's gospel: use wealth to make friends among the poor, because one day they will be the ones to welcome you into eternity.

I'm pretty sure it's coincidence that these readings fall right as many churches, including us, begin our fall pledge campaign. The lectionary compilers weren't picking and choosing passages to suit the programmatic needs of congregations on an annual fiscal cycle. But the timing is apt.

Money is a major topic for Jesus: he talks about it in a quarter of his parables, more than he does about sex, heaven, or hell. And it's a major topic for us. Each of us has some kind of relationship with money, whether we have millions in assets, live paycheck to paycheck, or don't have a bank account and use what cash comes through our hands as best we can, or somewhere in between. And each of us can use money wisely or foolishly, generously or selfishly, for things that endure or things that pass away. So let's talk practically this first Sunday of our pledge drive about an approach to money for disciples of Jesus.

Money itself is not bad. Paul doesn't say "money is the root of all evils" but "the love of money is the root of all evils." Jesus spent time with wealthy people and depended on some of them to support his ministry. But both Paul and Jesus are clear that money is dangerous precisely because it's so tempting. We can end up love it instead of loving the things it can do for God's kingdom.

Some people are called to actually give up all their possessions, to sell what they have and do something like join a religious order that holds all things in common. Yet most of us will be trying to live as disciples while still living in a world of money and possessions. And there are some basic principles for doing that. Many of those are shared with people of any faith or no faith: figure out how to make our income greater than our expenses. Get out of consumer debt. Save up a rainy-day fund. Getting our financial basics in order is part of discipleship, because we need to do that to be able to be generous to others. If you're struggling with these things, you're not alone and there's help available, and you can talk to me or another leader you trust to start finding some options.

If we have those basics in order—“food and clothing” as Paul puts it—we can put the rest to work for God’s kingdom. I will say that the very best tool I’ve found so far is the simple practice called percentage giving. It’s very simple. Calculate your income, figure out how much you currently give away to causes that advance God’s work, and see what percentage that is. Then, over time, work to grow that percentage—maybe by a percent a year, maybe half a percent.

Sometimes churches hold up 10% as a benchmark for giving. That’s a good, challenging number, but not a magic one. Some people should start at 2 or 3 or 4%. Some can give well beyond 10%. It’s not a matter of figuring out what percent of our resources belong to God and what to us: 100% of our lives belong to God, and it’s simply a matter of discerning how much of God’s money we need to spend on the appropriate needs of our households and what we can do with the rest for God’s mission. And although it’s our pledge campaign, I don’t think you have to give it all to your church. Church should be a central place to give, but there are lots of ways to serve God’s reign. Our family does half our giving to our parish and half to other causes we believe serve God’s mission.

This practice of percentage giving works for anyone—rich, poor, or in between—because no matter our means, there is some percentage of what we have that we can choose to give away. And that practice shapes us in good ways. It cultivates gratitude. It teaches trust. And it makes us stakeholders in the causes we support.

But don’t give to prove something to God or yourself. There is nothing you can do to make God love you more, bit less. Give out of gratitude, in response to the love and grace God has given you. Give not because you think you owe God 10% but because you know we all owe God 100%. God has given us life and salvation and every good blessing. When we give in turn, we are imitators of God.