

Homily 21 September 2025 (Rev) William D. Glenn

Amos 8:14-16; 1 Timothy 2: 1-7; Luke 16:1-13

A few days ago, I was in line for my Covid shot at Kaiser and as I was beginning to scroll Face Book on my iPhone, my friend Ken popped up. I regularly read his posts, for he is an eminent translator of scriptures from the Greek into contemporary English.

Instead of his usual contributions, Ken posted a video of his reading today's Gospel passage—in Greek—to emphasize this melodious spoken language. I had been thinking about this homily for several days, and hearing it in the original Greek, I found daunting, not exactly comforting. O Lord.

But I forged ahead. In doing some background on today's readings, I learned that today's Gospel is regarded by scholars as the hardest parable of Jesus' to understand. Well, of course it is. Again, O Lord.

Yet I forged ahead still.

And to preface my challenge, I began with this powerful passage from Amos. I really knew nothing about the book of Amos, other than having known he is one of the dozen or so minor prophets. But I think he may be mis-categorized, for reading Amos has the potency and adamancy and urgency of much of Isaiah. This passage from Hebrew Scripture was startling, in its clarity, its judgments on those with wealth who game the system to ensure their own success while *trampling on the needy, bringing ruin to the poor, practicing deceit in their dealings to enhance their position.*

I was taken up short. For we live in a culture which paralyzes those poor and those in need so to further dross the golden calves of those with undue wealth. And, in comparison, to these *anawim*, the humble, *beloved of God*, these poor, I knew that we are but downsized version of privilege and social location, and that we directly benefit from the rigged system.

And this speaks only to the exterior lives we lead.

The passage ends with the Lord speaking: *I will never forget any of their scheming deeds*. What will the Lord never forget?

Bonhoeffer came to mind—as he often does—and his legacy title *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Just what is that cost? For us? In these times? What is Amos braying about?

In this passage from the Luke's Gospel, to whom we listened last week and will do again next, a central theme continues to emerge: the reign of God, to which we most ardently aspire, requires *giving up all our other commitments*. Jesus' regard for women, the poor and the *otherized* is absolute. Luke's Jesus is razor-focused on the primacy we give to our external lives: the accumulations of rough-hewn shanks of power, glistening riches, the breadth of the ego-blandishments that occupy so much of our attention. I, of course, speak of myself, and perhaps you, if you are tracking with me.

Scripture scholars emphasize that today's parable is the most controversial parable of Jesus, often difficult to comprehend. And yet.

Variously called the *Parable of the Unjust Steward* or alternately, the *Parable of the Shrewd Manager*, Jesus speaks of a heretofore trusted senior manager, perhaps an accountant who deceives his boss by discounting debts owed the boss, to curry favor with these men who owe these big debts.

The shrewd manager/unjust steward—who admits he's not strong enough to dig a field nor humble enough to beg—meager employment options should he be terminated—creates a retinue of former debtors who will now be coerced into welcoming this unjust, shrewd man into their homes, back into their class. For he loves his status, and anyway, his uncalled hands are not equipped to do much else, nor does his pride allow himself the grace of honesty.

When the boss discovers this treachery, one might expect him to be enraged—but no—paradoxically—he commends this manager for his shrewd calculus.

Jesus observes, that for these *children of darkness*, children of a reptilian age—then, and now—the hoarders and influencers and transactionalists have more moxie than the children of light—supposedly us!

One of the foci of this dark resultant lifestyle—if you will—is the worship of an adaptable god, one who manifests anew every season, who demands loyalty to brand, to the market, to necessary deceit, to status, to *always more*, even to qualifying cruelty on occasion, if even in small dollops. Who cares?

I don't mean to be a crank. We focus so much on this dichotomy—rich and poor, the haves and the have nots, illusion over against the real.

It can be downright tiresome. Did Jesus have anything else to offer? Is the cost of discipleship always about feeding the hungry, always about clothing the naked, always about welcoming the stranger? Is the cost of discipleship always about these externals?

Well, yes and no. This central concern of Jesus' and Amos to care and provide for the poor, all kinds of poor, places this task as an *a priori* to Jesus' even deeper concern: our relationship to the one he calls Father, *Abba*, the Holy One, the Creator, the Source, and consequently, our relationship to each other. These twinned relationships can only be cultivated when we are stripped of the power we give away to the ultimately flimsy and diaphanous tiny little golden calves lined up on our ledge, our demanding egos whispering they are necessary to creating a self-satisfying life. What, a paltry life, no real life, only a pale but compelling imitation, this attractive masquerade, this glimmering dark hole.

We live in an epoch not unlike that of Amos, not unlike that of Jesus.

The reason Amos and Isaiah and Jesus and Bonhoeffer and so many others to whom we are drawn focus on what is called *the preferential option for the poor* is **that it is the only way into the human heart**. We aren't social workers, we are servants. This is the only way.

We live in a stripped-down time: health care, the climate crisis, undocumented *anawim*, the targeted lives of all kinds of *others*, the ability to speak freely: threatened, eliminated, ignored, hounded by masked brown shirts, silenced, cowed: *ad nauseum, ad nauseum*.

Jesus lived in such a time, in such a milieu. The palace guards and in service of the god-emperor Caesar, and Jesus' kinsmen, the Pharisees, in service of the Law, all hounded him, vilified him, taunted him, tailed him, were sore afraid of him, transacted with a friend of Jesus to capture him, then then crushed him and left his naked body on a cross bar to utterly shame him. The, by design, they killed him.

As a boy hanging around temple, he may well have read Amos, certainly Isaiah, Jeremiah, David's beautiful psalms. These prophetic voices framed the cost of discipleship as including just about *everything*. And Jesus gave just that.

As Dostoyevsky offered: *suffering is the sole origin of consciousness*.

This Yeshua, this Jesus, is now inviting us to take up the cross, a ludicrous symbol to many, and follow him. No metaphor, No poetic riff. Just be—or get—awake, come alive. Pick it up. That cross.

The instructions about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the wounded of body and spirit, comforting the grieving, demanding justice, this is our prelude-vocation right now in an exquisite way.

And yet the cost of discipleship goes beyond action, vital as that is.

We must simultaneously go inside, become our conscious, our true, selves.

Our fragile ego is *incapable* of leading us to our interior selves, our soulful selves, into to the presence of this Lord Jesus, a presence always flickering in our hearts. Our shiny baubles crack as we approach this holy center, our dross melts as we enter prayer, silence, the Eucharist, fellowship, simplicity, true friendship, tending to all the *open tables* we are invited to serve.

The cost will include suffering, or at least discomfort, as many in this congregation know well. But we need not be forlorn.

For we, who have Jesus as our North Star, and as we have come into this exquisite redwood chapel this morning, we do not do this alone, we are not stranded on the island of self-improvement, we are not banished to a life tinged with despair, our perfectionism is for naught, for we become the body of Christ.

The Holy One, this ineffable Love, wants, *yea needs*, our moxie, our courage, our humility, our grit, our sweetness, our openheartedness, our calloused hands, and yes, our joy.

*To heal this world and all that is in it.*

This Immanent Love invites us to be fully alive, and, as we approach the rail, with our hands open, no arrogance or artifice on our faces, we receive Love in this exquisite form, the body and blood of the One who loves us, without measure.

