

Divest and Reinvest

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[0 : 00] So today before I preach, I want to take a few minutes to go backwards before I go forward.

Because I think as one of your pastors, I want us to take just a few more minutes to recognize the gravity of this day. So as Meg, our co-director of prayer, said today and led us through today, it is Transgender Day of Remembrance.

We're stopping and trying to remember the lives of those lost, how worthy those folks were. But I want us to stop, especially, we're literally going to pause in a minute, because the violence that over and over is unleashed upon God's transgender children and God's LGBTQ children in no small part comes from God's own house.

And Pastor Anthony posted on social media earlier that non-affirming theology kills. I just want to lift that up as we begin today, as I start to preach today.

And I do urge you, if you have a little bit of time tonight, to go to, I know GLAAD has it on their website, their other websites, and actually go and look at the names.

[1 : 38] Go spend some time. Go sit. Go sit. And don't turn away too quickly. That is so often the temptation in our society is to turn away. We are those who follow the God who created night and day and separated dry land from the waters.

But as a society, we have often forgotten that God also created the dawn and the dusk, the marshes and the estuaries, the places in creation in which assumed categories are transgressed in order to create more beauty and more goodness.

And then the second thing that is true that NAG lifted up is this attack in Colorado Springs.

In this place where people likely went to let their hair down and be themselves, maybe the only place where they could do that and experience a sense of freedom.

This place where someone went to clean these God-loved and God-held lives. And y'all, when I woke up and I saw the news, I'm going to be honest that the only thing that first came to my mind was, how long?

[3 : 03] How long, oh Lord? How long until things will be set right? And how can they be set right?

How long? How long? How long? How long? Many of us in this room, by virtue of our race and our class, and just by living in this kind of liberal bubble that is DC, we are somewhat insulated from violence.

And yet many of us are also still struggling for the right to just take another breath. All over the world, that is true. So I'm going to ask for one more pause in the service.

And all I want, whether this needs to be for you, silent prayer. Some of you may need words right now. Or you just need a second to catch your breath.

I'm going to welcome that. And I pray more than anything today that your reflection drives you to anger.

[4 : 11] And that your anger drives you to desperation. And that your desperation drives you to creative action. And I pray that we would have the courage and the freedom to become like those who had such courage and freedom just to be themselves.

So we're going to take just one more minute. Do what you need to do in this moment. And then I will pray and move on into the sermon. Do what you need to do in this moment.

Lord, we are those who too often banish what we don't understand and too often destroy what we can't control.

Lord, I pray on this sacred day that our words would be more than religious sounds.

I pray that they would draw us as a community of faith into a newness that is action. Into a hope that is not cheap.

[6 : 04] Lord, help us to know our part as we face injustice after injustice and mourn and grieve.

May we be those who walk the long road to see your kingdom come. In Jesus' name. Okay.

So, after I woke up this morning and I thought to myself how long and just went into a general state of what do I do? What do I say? I was deeply tempted to change the course of this sermon and to talk about something very different today.

But then I realized that really what we're going to talk about today draws us into grappling with really so much of what this is all about which is how do we struggle for the commonwealth of God.

And as I think about overall what's sliding underneath the text that we're going to read today in Luke I realized that I don't have a lot of newness because what I'm about to say as regards and this is the day where we're wrapping up our series on generosity and communal economics what I'm going to say is something that probably a lot of us were taught years ago.

[7 : 30] We've heard it maybe over and over and you know we know it maybe intuitively in our bones and yet we it's so hard to do we struggle to do it.

My community group as you saw is reading this book is reading this book This Here Flesh and right at the beginning the author of the book says this this is not a book of new things or new ideas my thoughts have been thought before it is more remembrance than revelation and I would say the same of this sermon tonight it's much more remembrance than revelation we're going back to a passage in Luke which tells us of a story that contains a parable called the rich fool and it's a story that has lines in it that we might have heard of like do not worry about your life and seek first the kingdom of God and where your treasure is there your heart will be also is this kind of passage that should probably be in our weekly rotation of Bible readings and it's one that we need to hold on really tightly as we go into Black Friday and Giving Tuesday and all the pressure to consume that is Christmas so I'm going to read this passage and I'm going to read it pretty slowly and then I'm going to give us about five minutes in small groups to absorb it because it's that kind of passage and then I'll say a few things so this is Luke 12 13 through 34

Luke 12 13 through 34 someone in the crowd said to him teacher tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me but he said to him friend who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you and he said to them take care be on your guard against all kinds of grief for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions then he told him a parable the land of a rich man produced abundantly and he thought to himself what should I do for I have no place to store my crops then he said I will do this I will pull down my barns and build larger ones and there I will store all my grain and all my goods and I will say to my soul soul you have ample goods laid up for many years relax eat drink be merry but God said to him you fool this very night your life is being demanded of you and the things you have prepared whose will they be so it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God he said to his disciples therefore I tell you do not worry about your life what you will eat or about your body what you will wear for life is more than food and the body more than clothing consider the ravens they neither sow nor reap they have neither storehouse nor barn and yet God feeds them of how much more value are you than the birds and can any of you by worrying at a single hour to your lifespan if then you are not able to do such a small thing as that why do you worry about the rest and consider the lilies how they grow they neither toil nor spin yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these but if God so clothes the grass of the field which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire how much more will he clothe you you of little faith and do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink and do not keep worrying for it is the nations of the world who strive after these things and your father knows that you need them and shed strive for his kingdom and these things will be given to you as well do not be afraid little flock for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom sell your possessions and give alms make persons for yourselves that do not wear out an unfailing treasure in heaven for no things comes near and no moth destroys for where your treasure is there your heart will be also so let's take just a couple of minutes literally five minutes to pull together and look at this passage if you are online

I also just encourage you in the chat maybe you can kind of discuss what you are feeling around this passage but let's just take five minutes I do encourage you share names pronouns and also just kind of check in with each other for a few minutes to see how we're doing all right five minutes all right if we could let's come back together I feel so guilty asking how to stop talking I'm sorry I'm sorry oh gosh get some names and numbers do what you need to do to continue the conversation all right so I always wonder so much about what is discussed in these groups that I know we don't

have time to kind of ask that out loud but hopefully you had some fruitful at least check-ins or at least touching on the passage I'll just start by saying that for me beyond the difficulty of this piece of scripture there's a certain edge

I wonder if some of you talked about that it feels like to me this piece of scripture goes from don't worry to give which seems like a really problematic kind of line of reasoning don't worry about anything it'll be fine just give away all your possessions yes it feels like the kind of logic you might find in the mouth of like a corrupt politician or some kind of slick evangelist don't worry about it and then as a black gender non-conforming woman I kind of bristle at anybody telling me don't worry about your life for many of us there aren't a lot of people who will prioritize our survival unless we do and there aren't a lot of people who will tell us that we are our own best thing but what's really helpful to know in encountering this passage is that it's not addressed to people who are vulnerable in terms of resources or whose day-to-day survival is in question you've got to know that it's about people who have extra resources and who are relatively secure you know that because the guy who first comes you know has an inheritance coming to him it's a parable of a rich man you know that the target audience here is people who have enough that's important to know and we get this public encounter in this scripture between Jesus and this person who has this man who has access to wealth his family is able to leave him an inheritance and he wants Jesus to act as a mediator in a family dispute over how much he should receive and when and it's so interesting that in a crowd of people who are following

[15:08] Jesus because of his words of power and his deeds of power this man is attracted to what Jesus can do for him what the power of Jesus can do for him he wants to know what that power can do for him in terms of his greed and some of us know that there are some gospels floating around in our country that are very similar to that and then the reply of Jesus is really sharp be on your guard against all kinds of greed and greed here has the sense of desire to grow bigger to maximize abundance to yearn for increase to those desires Jesus says take care be on your guard Jesus seems to be saying that to avoid such greed requires a vigilant and active defense then Jesus makes clear the temptation to continually yearn for increase is really about temptation to view life through a particular lens the lens that says that material resources are what ultimately bring security and then Jesus shares a parable that's come the next move basically there's a rich man who finds himself with overabundance he ponders in his heart what he could do or what he should do with so much and he decides to build bigger barns he is growing bigger so he needs to secure his earnings he takes crops out of circulation without thought for those who might be hungry but in some ways we can't be too hard on him because he's really doing what any good business person would do he's reinvesting in his own enterprise yet his business practice the way he chooses to reinvest comes at the expense of other people it's clear that he has decided where his security is where his life is and it's in ample goods to paraphrase

Henry David Thoreau he goes confidently in the direction of his dreams of his vision of the good life with strong assertions of his own will apart from God and apart from neighbor despite his confidence he's completely isolated did you notice that like there's no he's like literally talking to himself in this parable his poverty his abundance I should say is actually poverty it's a poverty of abundance and for all his planning he's considered a fool in the economy of God some translations of the Greek text suggests that it is not God who takes the man's life but instead his actual possessions the rich man's vision of the good life actually calls him his real life and then finally in verse 22 Jesus begins to reflect with his disciples on the meaning of the parable and he starts his reflections with this summons do not be the kind of people who worry about your lives if you are in a position where you have a little extra or a lot extra do not let your life be consumed in anxiety about current and future resources and mind you this is not primarily a call to abandon the feeling of anxiety although that is definitely a good thing this is an invitation to abandon the practice of letting anxiety govern your decision making do not let worry control what you desire

Jesus says what you seek and what you struggle toward instead Jesus asked the disciples to let their lives be founded on the utter gratuity of God gratuitous generosity to the ravens who were considered unclean in the first century world gratuitous generosity to wildflowers which have no purpose at all except to be free and to grow wild in the most unexpected places the choice presented is clear we can seek our security in material things or we can trust in the God who squanders wherever she goes and then I'll confess that what I kind of love about this passage but also shakes me up is that the second choice the choice to trust in material resources is presented in

such a patently idiotic light those who do such things are just really straightforwardly called fools the logic of Jesus' reflection demonstrate that such a trust is absurd you can't even make your life longer or yourself taller after all and then

Jesus says the most damning thing that such misplaced trust is a sign of weak faith you gotta let that one sink in because that's a hard teaching instead Jesus says the disciples are called to desire to seek and to struggle for something entirely different the commonwealth of God the kingdom of heaven come here and now this is the antidote to trying to secure life with money and possessions this is the way to be on guard against drifting along with our culture into the belief that our lives consist in the abundance of possessions the line of reasoning here is that the best defense be on guard is actually a really good offense and a play we are to perform consistent three moves do what we can to let go of fear divest then reinvest in alternative ways of being reinvest in the struggle for the kingdom of God and y'all it's at this point both after those three points and at this point in our service that I realized I could just go on and on but I'm not

I'm not this is really hard stuff and there aren't easy answers it's up to us to specifically discern how we live this out how we answer these questions specifically how we let go of fear how we answer the question about what systems we're participating in and giving resources to that we need to pull out of where we need to reinvest in order to create a world that is God's dream as we leave this series and go into the holidays we're asking you to discern those things to find out what it means to practice the kind of life that is defined by giving instead of grasping and I can reiterate what Pastor Anthony said too as we close this series that none of this happens without a plan you have to have a north star when it comes to material resources for me my north star is grounded in Toni

[23 : 12] Morrison's intergenerational image in her novel *Beloved* in that novel she describes a community of formerly enslaved people who are finding liberation through embodiment through the unwinding of trauma and through the command to love their own hearts Morrison calls the space this natural space in which the folks gather for physical and spiritual salvation she calls it the clearing and what happens in the clearing is led by this ordinary unschooled woman who loves God is outside of the philosophy of the plantation and I want to see more and more of those places become their own version more and more places more and more churches become their own best version of the clearing and for me I think some of the best chances for that to happen are in church spaces like this one that's why I can ask you all to invest in the table and that's why I personally as part of my plan invest in church starts that have at their foundation radical inclusion and justice orientation and the affirming of LGBTQ folks my plan is the clearing that's my north star but what is yours what is your north star and what is your plan based on that north star finally y'all

I started by noting my decision to not change direction in the sermon and that's because today and the events of this morning I think have to draw us into remembering that we are called to the struggle for God's commonwealth to seek first the kingdom Anthony is about to come up and say a few things in relation to our own community and resources and fundraising and yeah I do hope that part of your discernment is about investing in this community but the call to communal economics is far more than that it reminds us that the struggle is far bigger than that and it reminds us that to reach critical mass on the issues that God cares about that we have to first become critical yeast people who are wisely sharing our resources in targeted ways over the long haul friends may we receive today the good news that is that it is God's delight to give us the kingdom the kingdom is yours we say and may we share our resources gratuitously with radical generosity and trust in the God who has ever given amen so we have just launched this past week a giving campaign for the table church and inviting you all to invest in what we are doing here and to kind of you know encourage that

I have this Apple photos folder that I keep called nice and not so nice notes yep nice and not so nice notes and you may be wondering Anthony why do you keep both and I'm reminded of my favorite 100% true documentary of my home state Indiana Parks and Recreation in which one of the characters says keep on with your booing I am fueled by your hatred now quick aside that was an easy joke for me to make because people's hatred usually does not end in my material harm and I just want to say like I almost deleted this joke because of like that seems like a really stupid thing to say today but I also wanted to be wrong in public because I think that's important there are some people whose hatred will end in not their fuel but their harm so I just want to say that like not to make it all dark and gloomy in here it's already dark and gloomy in the world and so I just I don't know I just wanted to say that my joke could also remind someone that it's not true of everybody all

that said

I do have this personality that when when I get the not so nice notes about me or the church or someone here it's a reminder of like oh I know the kind of person who sent this and if I'm taking them off they're probably doing fine so let me share a few of these with you the first one the table has kept a lot of people afloat in this awful time and we are so grateful that the table has been helping us hear God's good word of love towards our fellow humans next one so many of us have felt seen supported led and inspired by the table church and that's the table church at its best because of people like you because of our ministry our small groups all those things people are seen and heard and seen in their humanity next one quote you have bombarded us with self-righteous blabbering I no longer even understand what has happened to you you're leading like a Pharisee why have you decided to be a social activist instead of a pastor

I take umbrage at this why have we decided that pastors cannot be social activists in fact what did we think Jesus and Paul and James and John and the Mary Magdalene and what do we think they were doing of not turning the world upside down next one somehow in all of my grief and rage I found God again next one after the riots on January 6th I wanted to hear what a church had to say about all of that so I tuned in to y'all's live stream and I haven't missed a week since I'm really grateful for all the truth is all the table is and does next one you misinterpret scripture to validate you modern day views of society and that's heresy you'll have to answer to a sovereign and holy God for on judgment day for the misleading of your church attendees have a great day I love the three exclamation points sending me next one this is my first time in a group of this sort after many years apart from any organized church and I felt safe comfortable reassured it was once unimaginable to be part of a group that was yet led by someone who could make me feel embraced rather than perpetually suppressed or silenced that is refreshing and means the world next one this one means a lot to me

[30 : 11] I was totally ready to denounce my faith I was raised in a very conservative evangelical Christian home and I began what I later connected as deconstructing and just could not fathom how my core beliefs could possibly be supported by the beliefs of the church but then I heard the table stance how it stands for humanity I didn't know it was even possible that the Bible was so misinterpreted and the table gave me the ability to challenge interpretations at least one human in the world didn't give up on God because of the table and I know that story is not there's not just one it's a lot of us a lot of us are here or watching online across the country because of that and so when we invite y'all to give to invest to serve it's not you know to pad our books or pockets it's not to have good stats which I'm going to share some stats with you in a second because it makes a difference it makes an actual difference in people's lives and souls anti-affirming or anti-black or brown or anti-human theology kills

I believe good theology an accurate view of what God is really like can give life so the invitation is to be a part of that so some stats the table church is much larger than a lot of people think because we're so distributed we're not particularly centralized and I'm kind of cool with that there are 19 groups with about 248 members between them we have 368 members and regular attenders 100 or more folks who consider themselves part of this church but they're watching online because they're far away they can't find a church that will support them or value them we've got 40 kids in this church and we had 9 babies born this year this year over the past 12 months we've had 42,000 online video views and 7,000 podcast downloads what this church is and does is because of the people who make that happen and it's because folks find a sense of community and hope and belonging and then that has this tendency to be contagious and it's an amazing thing to be a part of and honestly

I don't know honoring humbling it just it gives me life it gets me out of bed in the morning so some goals that we have is to have 150 recurring givers giving an average of \$175 a month and I say average because some of us are only able to give \$10 a month some of us are able to give a thousand or more dollars a month what it needs to be is about \$175 on average right now we are at \$106 we've made good strides since last week's announcement but the work continues we have a goal of about \$32,000 in total giving per month that would meet our budget for us to be able to keep doing the things that we're doing to have the staff to have the leaders to be able to resource our groups to be able to do our justice and compassion efforts to be able to rent our space and pay for all of the online stuff that we do now in this age and we're currently around an average of \$23,500 per month and so the invitation is to find a way to be a part of that for all of you who are who have

been my deepest gratitude and thanks because you've seen some of the stories and you've seen some of the people that were pissing off and I want to keep doing that so thank you and for those of you who have in some way benefited from the work of the table who have been able to move closer to the God of the universe who created you with love and affection my invitation is for you to also join in in that work if it's financially if it's with your skills your talents or both that invitation is wide open so if you go to thetablechurch.org/give you'll see all the varieties of ways that you can give you can set up online giving recurring the best way that it works for us is if you set that up with your checking account that way we pay less fees if you already give via a credit card or debit card you can change that if you pay with a credit card or debit card that's fine too we also are able to accept like stock donations there's information on that we also do have a donation box in the foyer this week so if that's the best way for you to give you can put in a check or you can mail one using the address there again this is an invitation to as pastor tonight has said divest and invest to divest from systems that cause harm and to invest in things that give life like i said last week we don't need 10% we just need some and if everyone contributes then we will be able to keep pursuing our vision of a church where everyone can belong where everyone can experience the love of God and everyone can experience growth transformation and justice so would you pray with me i'll invite Heidi for communion god we thank you for the generosity of all the people gathered here who are part of this church it's all possible because of generosity god it's all possible because because of investment in what you are up to here and so god may we continue may we continue looking at what you are up to and joining that work god however we can with our with our bodies with our resources with our talents with our skills with our presence with our prayers god may we invest so that more and more people may know the beautiful news of your love and your salvation for everyone god we pray these things in the name of jesus amen and amen