

“Our Money Story: Remember” Luke 22:1-23, Rev. Michele Ward
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 4, 2020
Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore, MD

Every single one of us has a money story, whether we are aware of it or not. We might be living a story based on anxiety or guilt. We might be living a story that the church is irrelevant. We might be living a story that our choices will not have any impact on the community around us or on the systems that we want to change. We might be living a story that we do not have enough--enough money, enough time, enough love.

God speaks a new story into all of the ones that we tell ourselves. This is why Pastor Andrew and I are spending the next month preaching on our money story as individuals and as a community. Our stewardship series this month invites us to discover and to tell our stories about money in the context of God’s money story. Through the end of October, we will invite you to remember, release, reimagine, and restore our money story as individuals and as a community so we re-align with God’s story of wholeness and justice. We can tell a new story--the story that God invites us to live out, together.

Our first week of the series we reflect on the theme “remember,” spending time with our own spoken and unspoken money stories so we can more deeply think about how these have an effect on stewardship practices in our personal lives and in our church community. In particular, we spend time at the table with Jesus and the disciples remembering the night that Judas betrays Jesus. Judas does this for money--for payment. The religious and political leaders know what will motivate Judas--financial gain--and they use this reality to manipulate him into betraying Jesus. What we also remember this morning is that Jesus invites Judas to the dinner table with everyone else, even though the betrayal happens before the meal. In the story of the Last Supper, the first time Jesus taught the disciples and all of us how to take communion, in the midst of betrayal, Jesus gives us the gift of provision-- “the holy meal of remembrance.”¹

Fear keeps our brains and our hearts from acting the way that God invites us to live. I recently watched the 1984 movie *Dune* based on the 1965 book of the same title by Frank Herbert. Paul Atreides, the protagonist, says one of the most well known quotes from that movie: “Fear is the mind killer.” He says this when the strength of his mind is being tested. In the story he is not in physical danger, but his mind tells him that he is. To pass the test, he must not give into the thought of physical pain. Paul succeeds by repeating the phrase “Fear is the mind killer,” reminding himself that he can endure and he is safe.

¹Week One: Remember. “Sermon Planning Guide.” *Our Money Story*. A Sanctified Art, LLC. Page 2.

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I think of this scene when I think about the actions that lead up to the Last Supper and to Judas betraying Jesus. Fear kills the mind of Judas. Fear kills the minds of some of the religious and political factions, in particular the ones who are afraid of Jesus and his teachings. The fear in their minds keeps them from seeing Jesus for who he is--the Son of God. They are plotting against Jesus and desire his murder. They employ one of the people closest to Jesus to help them accomplish this--Judas, the keeper of the purse and the “treasurer” of the Jesus movement.

They are afraid--afraid of Jesus, afraid of the people following Jesus, afraid of the talk in the streets about him being the Messiah, afraid of a religious and political insurrection. They do not engage Jesus in relationship to sort out their differences or display any curiosity about him at all. Instead, they follow fear and teach Judas how to betray Jesus. And what does Judas get out of this deal? Money. Judas says yes--he will betray his teacher and the religious and political leaders are satisfied.

Remember--remember the times money is destructive in your life, in the lives of others. Because this is a story where people in power monetize fear. Because this is a story where Jesus invites Judas to the table, a table where Jesus freely shares bread and wine. The sharing act marks Jesus in a significant way: the one who comes to bring a different economy, not one based on fear, but one based on the Kin-dom of God. Walter Brueggeman says this: “Jesus was commending and performing an economy that was sure to collide with established economic patterns and with those who presided over and benefited from such patterns. His term for the alternative economy was ‘kingdom of God,’ that is, a social practice and a set of social relationships that are congruent with the God of the covenantal Torah of ancient Israel.”² Jesus invites the disciples, even Judas who will betray him with a kiss the next night, to participate in this new economy. Even up until his impending death, Jesus invites the one who will lead him to his murder to be part of that new social order over a meal. The new way is here, right now, Jesus says, and everyone has a seat at this table, perhaps, especially) Judas.

Since I am challenging you to share money stories of your own, I will share one of mine. The economy in my household was out of balance. I grew up in a family where my father had tight control over our finances. I remember hearing the story of my father cutting up my mother’s credit card shortly after their wedding because he needed control over their money and how it was spent. I remember my father writing my mother a check for her weekly allowance for household expenses, like groceries, utilities, and incidentals. I remember the double standards of spending in our family. My father would often buy himself

²Brueggemann, Walter. *Money and Possessions*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016). 23.

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expensive cars and horses, and yet we did most of our shopping at thrift stores and wore hand me downs from our cousins. Fear was the mind killer for my father, and he used control of money in our home as a symbol of his power. One of his favorite quotes to justify this was from the 1964 comic strip, *The Wizard of Id*, exchange: “Remember the Golden Rule!” the king shouts “Those with the gold make the rules!” The people shout back.

I tell you one of my “pull it off of the shelf” stories to show you how common it is for our money stories to use fear to control us. Jesus did not come so we would live in fear any longer. Jesus did not come so we would abuse our power any longer.

Jesus has come so we would have a new way of life. Jesus has come so we could sit at the table together, sinners and saints, sharing a common meal, as one body. Jesus takes what we need for life together and divides it equally among us. This is what he asks them to remember. “The elements and the meal are identified in different ways: the body of Christ, broken; the blood of Christ, shed; the Bread of heaven, the cup of salvation, the mystery of faith, the supper of the Lamb. But in every tradition I know, someone, at some point, says, 'Remember.' Remember how God became one of us? Remember how God ate with us and drank with us, laughed with us and cried with us? Remember how God suffered for us, and died for us, and gave his life for the life of the world? Remember? Remember?”³

He asks me to make room at the table for my father, too, because there is room for everyone, even the betrayers and the abusers, because the kin-dom of God is for each and every one of us.

What money stories do you have to tell? What do you remember? What do you need to take off of the shelf and look at a little closer? What ways have you abused your power and privilege that you need to confess? What ways have others taken away your agency?

Jesus invited Judas to the table.

Jesus’ new economy divides and freely gives resources.

Our money stories shape our relationships to God and to one another..

And our relationship with money has a direct impact on how we give.

³Evans, Rachel Held. *Searching for Sunday*. (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015). 128.