

May 3, 2020

Acts 2:40-47, *The Message Bible*

One of the things we are learning in this pandemic and shelter-in-place entombment is how connected the world is. In an article from the magazine “Christian Century” a clergywoman, Angela Denker, wrote we are learning, first-hand, about the myth of self-reliance. Now, we who are active in a faith community have known there is no truth in the belief that someone is “self-made”. The very reason we are involved in a faith community is to strengthen the ties that bind us to one another and to all creation.

As I reflected on the words of my colleague, it became clear to me that in this time of crisis the dark side of the world’s economy is being revealed. In these days there is a very apparent difference between the world’s economy and God’s economy. Up until the end of February it was very clear, by paycheck, who was essential to our economy – bankers, stock traders, and athletes. Money is god in the world’s economy, and those are the people who earn millions, if not billions, of dollars.

In the world’s economy we put a very small dollar value on jobs that do not require a lot of education – garbage collectors, janitors, and grocery store workers for example. There are also professions that require an education that we seem not to value, since we fund them so poorly – CNA’s, mental health workers, and social workers. The lack of monetary value often makes these workers invisible to most of society.

This is not a new phenomenon. In the reading from Acts Peter is challenging the world economy of his time that values wealth over people. This is why, when telling the story of Jesus and encouraging people to follow the Way of Life Jesus taught, Peter says, “Get out of this sick and stupid culture.” We then learn of the community people are invited to be a part of. “All the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything

in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met.”

They “pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met.” This is God’s economy. Meeting each person’s need.

Now, I know the limitations. If the whole world lived as Jesus lived, who would farm and provide food, who would produce needed materials and sew clothes? If everyone one was itinerant, where would we house ourselves to keep warm in winter? God’s economy, though, is based on meeting each person’s need, not living the indigent life of Jesus.

In the midst of this pandemic our interdependence and connectedness are being highlighted. This invisible enemy, Covid-19, is showing us how connected and how small our world is. One of the things being revealed in this crisis is how important those workers who up until now were invisible are to the well-being of us all.

While we have, for a long time now, paid doctors and nurses well, look at the list of “essential workers” in this crisis: CNA’s in hospitals and nursing homes, childcare providers, janitors, grocery store workers, truck drivers, mental health counselors. Given what they earn, the world’s economy does not think of them as “essential”. Before the pandemic we hardly paid attention to them. They were practically invisible. But they are the ones who help to keep us healthy and whole, before the pandemic and especially now. They are the ones risking their lives for us.

God’s economy, remember, is meeting each person’s need. In this crisis the failings of the world economy are being laid bare – we have not been, and still are not, meeting each person’s need. As always it is the poor and underpaid who are suffering the most. One’s health is connected to one’s economic standing.

This is not new, but maybe now we are listening. Here are some truisms:

- Those with money can afford to isolate, comfortably and even be outdoors. The poor are locked indoors with nowhere to escape to. This grows the tension and adds emotional stress to all in the house.
- Those who can afford health insurance and see a doctor whenever needed, without question, are usually in good health. Without health insurance or being under-insured one usually has to be so sick one waits to go to the hospital to see a doctor.
- Stress also contributes to ill health. Homelessness, food insecurity, rent, all are stress factors that can affect one's physical and mental health.
- Covid-19 has had a disproportionately negative effect on the African-American community. This is because they have so many pre-existing health conditions; pre-existing conditions that centuries of racism and poverty have exacerbated.
- Not only have the essential workers in God's economy been mostly invisible until now, another segment of our society has been shunted off and hidden away. Our senior citizens. When the crisis came, hospitals, schools, businesses, even churches were all carefully regulated and planned for. It seems we forgot our seniors in nursing homes.

The world's economy has done a good job, for a long time of keeping the true "essential workers" hidden away, under-valued. Sheltering-in-place, isolation, entombment is hopefully allowing not only the skies to clear, but our vision as well.

I am hopeful in this regard, because many of the things we are being asked to do in the face of this pandemic could have been taken from our faith teachings. They have to do with implementing God's economy.

- We are being asked to shelter-in-place for the good of the community. We are to sacrifice a little of our comfort for the good of all. Sound familiar?
- We are asked to help our neighbor who might be struggling.
- We are asked to take a financial hit for the good of the community.
- And, finally, we are seeing and valuing grocery store clerks, janitors, garbage collectors, truck drivers, cna's, and mental health professionals.

This pandemic has opened our eyes to the things we had forgotten, things that are vital to the well-being of the human community and ultimately the well-being of our planet. In many ways it really is a battle between the world's economy and God's economy.

The world has for far too long lived into a winner-take-all, it's-all-about-me individualism. As the world economy now faces a common enemy, the world is re-learning what the church has always known: the importance of community and the necessity of making sure each person's need is met. In other words, the importance of living into God's economy.

As we slowly begin to emerge from this pandemic, it is my prayer that we, you and I, Amicable Church will take what we are now learning from our entombment and, ever more focused, continue to live into God's economy by lifting up the importance of community by welcoming all into our community, by recognizing, in words and deeds, our dependence on one another, and by making sure, to the best of our ability, that each person's need is met.

May God's Spirit touch our own, opening our eyes and hearts, guiding and encouraging us to live into God's economy. Amen.