

LUKE'S GOSPEL

LUKE 24: 1-4

Justice & Righteousness Series

OPENING PRAYER

Transforming and energising God forgive us when we collude with the status quo that seems happy to take from those at the bottom of society and give to those who have much more than they need. Help us to be attentive to the ways in which injustice is often hidden. Amen

EXEGESIS

Luke's Gospel is believed by some scholars to be written by a non-Jewish source, mainly as a rebuke and a challenge to the rich gentile followers of Jesus. Chapters 16 – 19 for e.g. are all challenging teachings against the rich, who, in the context of occupied Judea are symptomatic of economic exploitation.

One of the ways in which Biblical scholars and theologians are attempting to re-read and interpret the Bible is by means of 'Postcolonial Theory'. Postcolonial Theory is a critical, scholarly approach to challenging and critiquing representations of truth that have been shaped by the seemingly all powerful frameworks of colonialism and empire. The postcolonial framework for interpreting the Gospels, for example, emerges when the reader recognises that the context in which the entire New Testament canon was composed was one that was informed by that of colonialism and empire. Judea, in which Jesus' ministry was largely located, was an occupied colony of the Roman Empire. Many scholars have shown the extent to which wealth in this province was always connected with economic exploitation. In this passage, a postcolonial reading sees Jesus condemning the exploitation of the poor (seen in the widow's mite) and in so doing, he is challenging the whole system of temple worship. In issuing this prophetic denunciation, Jesus is attacking the very seat of economic power in colonially run Judea, and announcing as he does so, the ultimate destruction of the temple and the ushering in of the Kingdom of God.

In this latter example, The Widow is not meant to serve as an example of personal piety (i.e. she gives all that she has), but rather as a denunciation of a corrupt system that makes a vulnerable person like a widow feel compelled to give all she has. Why should a rich socio-religious institution like the temple demand everything from a poor widow? You might have imagined that a rich temple should be giving her money and not the other way around? The salient question remains: how can the church be a counter-cultural force that challenges the seemingly all pervasive power of rich western economic frameworks that take from the poor in order to enrich themselves?

REFLECTION

This text reminds us of the way in which even religious institutions are often guilty of exploiting the poor. How do we respond to the challenges presented by this text? Has the church colluded in the exploitation of the poor in our globalized and exploitative world - the seductive message of 'come and join in with our system (of monopoly capitalism) and you will be OK'. Was this widow persuaded to put in all she had as an offering on the basis that she might receive great 'financial blessings' as a result? Is this not the case with many of the successful practitioners of 'Prosperity Gospel' led approaches to Christian mission and ministry? Give what little you have to churches that pay pastors extravagant salaries, so that they can drive top of the range executive cars, in order that you might receive a blessing from the Lord?

The postcolonial message Jesus seems to be offering to the first hearers of his 'upside down' Kingdom message still applies in our current era – namely, why should the poor and the socially marginalised give all they have to sustain rich organisations that should be supporting them financially and not the other way around?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does this reading of this familiar text disturb the more traditional ways in which it has been interpreted?
2. What are the implications for how we 'do church' if we take this text seriously as a postcolonial critique of power and exploitation?

CLOSING PRAYER

God of Justice, give us eyes to see the covert forms of injustice in the world, ears to hear cries of the poor who are being exploited and a heart that cares and wants to be alongside those who are on the margins, often without a voice. Amen.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Itumeleng J. Mosala Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.M.B Eerdmans, 1989)
- Musa W. Dube Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible - St. Louis: Chalice press, 2000)
- Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner and Mayra Rivera (eds.) (Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire - St. Louis: Chalice press, 2004)

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