

Amos 8:4-7

Psalm 113

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Luke 16:1-13

Sermon Sept 18th 2022

Where Is Our Focus?

High inflation, interest rate hikes, unemployment rates creeping up, high household debt, market uncertainty, cost of living increases. Many of us are probably spending three to four times a day on our computer or smart phone banking. Obsessing and worrying about the amount of money in our accounts. Thinking that if we stare long enough at the total, more money will magically appear in our savings (**Image**).

We are spending a lot of our time and energy focusing on money these days. Not only as individuals, but also, as a community. These issues are front and center for a lot of our institutions as they too struggle to cover their operating costs due to high inflation, as well as, try to find the financial means to offer supports for the people who are struggling to pay their bills.

We are spending a lot of our time and energy focusing on money.

Well, throughout the gospels, we see that Jesus is no stranger to this issue. In Jesus' time, there were many people who were suffering in poverty due to tough economic conditions (**Image**). They too found themselves focusing a lot on their money situation as they longed to have access to everything they needed.

When Jesus came into their community, they were hopeful he would change their circumstances. Including offering solutions to their money problems.

In response to their focus on money, in response to our focus on money, Jesus shares several parables and sermons with us to address our concerns. To help us refocus our attention on God, and God's promises for our lives. To encourage us to trust in God for our wellbeing. To see that it is God who provides.

Now, the parable we hear today, is hard to understand. A shrewd manager who cheats his boss to protect himself gets praise from the very boss who fires him. Hard to imagine that Jesus would be praising anyone for cheating someone.

Instead, I think Jesus wants to highlight the sheer focus the manager has had on his self-preservation. By focusing on all the little details of what he needs to do to survive this interrogation, he is able to not only gain favour with clients, but also with the very boss, who fires him. So, that when he loses his job, he will not be left desolate.

It isn't in his cheating that the manager is praised, but in his persistent focus on the task at hand, on everything he needs to do to preserve his self.

Jesus encourages us, his followers, to have this same focus on the tasks of the kingdom. To pay faithful attention to all the opportunities God gives us to be loving and kind to one another. Whether, it is giving a cup of water to someone who is thirsty, or visiting a friend in a nursing home, or teaching a Sunday School class (**Image**), or feeding a neighbour's cat, or writing a note of appreciation to someone who feels unappreciated, or listening to a friend's lament, or standing up for someone who is being mistreated.

Jesus encourages us, his followers, to focus on all the little details that make up the kingdom of God. On all the opportunities God gives us to be loving and kind to one another.

Because, there are two major challenges we face when we spend too much time focusing on money. First, we feel insecure when we keep dwelling on our financial situation. We start to doubt, worry that God's promises for our lives will not be fulfilled. That God will not take care of us. That God will not provide for our wellbeing. That we will be left with nothing.

When we live with this insecurity it makes it harder for us to live out our faith. It makes it harder for us to see all the opportunities God gives us to be loving and kind to one another. It makes it harder for us to be generous to others, because we fear that we will not have enough.

Which brings me to the second challenge. When we focus too much on money, we don't focus enough on all the other things in life that are important for our wellbeing. That are important for us in revealing God's kingdom come. Our relationships. Our discipleship.

Jesus wants us to take all that focus that we direct towards our bank accounts, our money, and redirect that focus towards God's kingdom come. To focus on all the opportunities God gives us to be loving and kind to one another.

This doesn't mean we neglect our finances or completely ignore money. That is impossible in an economy that is driven by monetary means. What it does mean is that our money shouldn't take away our focus from loving people. From being kind. Instead, God encourages us to use our money as a means to reflect God's care and generosity to others (**Image**).

When we find ourselves focusing more so on being loving and kind to one another we then also find ourselves trusting God more with our lives. We don't get so worried when we face challenging economic times, because we believe in God's promise that God will take care of us. God will provide for our wellbeing. God will give us the resources we need to help.

We will bear witness to God's care, God's promises being fulfilled, God's gifts, through the love and kindness we show one another.

When we turn our focus back on God, we also see that God focuses on us as much as the manger focuses on his own self-preservation. God focuses on every little detail of our lives, caring for us, providing for us, giving us an abundance of opportunities to be loving and kind to one another.

Let us pray, gracious God, as we deal with the financial stresses of our lives, turn our hearts to trust in you. Redirect our focus from our insecurities and worries to your opportunities for us to be loving and kind to one another. **Amen.**

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