



Sermon, March 25, 2018  
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

## Sermon Series: Tending the Path “Engaging the Powers”

### Scripture: Luke 19:1-48 (NRSV)

**19** He entered Jericho and was passing through it. **2** A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. **3** He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. **4** So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. **5** When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” **6** So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. **7** All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” **8** Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” **9** Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

### The Parable of the Ten Pounds

**11** As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. **12** So he said, “A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return. **13** He summoned ten of his slaves, and gave them ten pounds, and said to them, ‘Do business with these until I come back.’ **14** But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to rule over us.’ **15** When he returned, having received royal power, he ordered these slaves, to whom he had given the money, to be summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by trading. **16** The first came forward and said, ‘Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds.’ **17** He said to him, ‘Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities.’ **18** Then the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your pound has made five pounds.’ **19** He said to him, ‘And you, rule over five cities.’ **20** Then the other came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, **21** for I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’ **22** He said to him, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked slave! You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? **23** Why then did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest.’ **24** He said to the bystanders, ‘Take the pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds.’ **25** (And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten pounds!’) **26** ‘I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. **27** But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.’”

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Parable of the Pounds is often interpreted in light of stewardship and what one does with the gifts one has been given. But this is not a stewardship sermon in Luke. It must be read in context. The context begins with Jesus extending forgiveness and salvation to Zacchaeus, who had been a collaborator with the Roman occupiers, and who participated in the financial oppression of his own people. This was his lostness. Jesus helps restore him to his community and reconcile his estrangement. There are those who grumble against this.

He then proceeds to tell the parable of the hated king who sends out 10 servants to do business. It is immediately preceded by the comment, “...because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.” Is this parable told as a critique of their supposition of what the kingdom of God is all about? Consider these points:

- Jerusalem is the seat of power in Judea. Political power has intruded into temple life.
- The king is hated, as are all kings. So, any notion of kingly comparisons being attributed to God cannot be based upon human experience of kings. The king in the story acts as any human despot would. His actions are arbitrary, and his treatment of his subjects is cruel and vindictive. No wonder they hate him!
- It is immediately followed by the enacted parable or sign-act of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey rather than entering as a conquering hero mounted on a great white stallion or something similar. When Jesus enters, the crowds acclaim him and call for healing, salvation and blessing. They trust him, unlike the king in the story.
- In many ways this parable depicts just the sort of king that Samuel warns the Israelites against when they want to make Saul a king in Samuel 8:

**8: 4** Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah,  
**5** and said to him, “You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for

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us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.” **6** But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to govern us.” Samuel prayed to the Lord, **7** and the Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

**8** Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. **9** Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

**10** So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. **11** He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; **12** and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. **13** He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. **14** He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. **15** He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. **16** He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. **17** He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. **18** And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.” **19** But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! but we are determined to have a king over us, **20** so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

- Jesus weeps over Jerusalem because it has gone after earthly kingdoms and power rather than focusing upon the gift of its heritage as being a sacred city, devoted to teaching the world about the One True God, and how to live lives of profound spiritual insight and transformation.
- Recall his mission: Anointed by God to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Love and justice.
- This parable does not display any of those qualities in the king, servants or people of the kingdom. But it is a good parable of the social, political and religious system as it was then, and still is to a

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great extent today. It is a parable about a system of living that maintains economic stratification and poverty of soul, that treats people as slaves and captives, that is filled with blindness and oppresses people.

Thus I believe this parable to be part of Jesus’ critique of the spiritual blindness and ideological captivity of people and the systems they create that continue the rejection of God that extends back to Samuel’s time, and before that even.

So, what does Jesus offer in contrast? What he offers is himself as God’s alternative. From the very beginning of Luke to the end, Jesus is God’s visitation of love and justice in the flesh. Jesus is God’s vision of how to get connected to God, and how to live a life filled with the Spirit of God. But how is this to be done? The only way it can be done is to fully divest ourselves of all our notions of military might, political power, economic privilege and religious superiority. Jesus does this dramatically. We are going to re-enact the drama in a moment. But I invite you to first take a moment and look at the beautiful “palm branches” that have been given to you. As you walk around and wave them, let them symbolize everything you think about power and privilege and superiority in our world. Then as you come around to lay them down, release all those earth-bound ideas in order to make room for God’s heaven-embraced ideas.