

Summary: Week Twenty-six **Economy** June 24 - June 29, 2018

There is no authentic God experience that does not situate you in the world in a different way. You see things differently, and you have the security to be free from your usual loyalties: privilege, position, group, and economy. (Sunday)

What is Western culture's primary frame of reference? *Money and power* seem to come first. The dominant system in our society is production and consumption. (Monday)

God is bought and sold more than loved, waited for, or surrendered to. This is why Jesus' anger (and even destruction of property) was aimed at those selling and buying in the temple. (Tuesday)

Contemplative practice helps me hold the tension of suffering with my responsibility to participate in its healing. (Wednesday)

We are faced with a paradox. On the one hand money is properly a token of gratitude and trust, and agent of the meeting of gifts and needs. . . . As such it should make us all richer. Yet it does not. Instead, it has brought insecurity, poverty, and the liquidation of our cultural and natural commons. —Charles Eisenstein (Thursday)

Jesus invites us to stand in solidarity with the poor. We must come close to real people who are hurting. We then can amplify their authentic stories of suffering and cries for change. (Friday)

Practice: Solidarity with Suffering: *For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.* —Mark 14:7

This verse is often used as an excuse to do nothing about poverty. In fact, Jesus is calling us to live in solidarity with suffering! My friend Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners, explains the context and meaning of this verse.

They are at the dinner table with a leper, and Jesus is making an assumption about his disciples' continuing proximity to the poor. He is saying, in effect, "Look, you will always have the poor with you" because you are my disciples. You know who we spend our time with, who we share meals with, who listens to our message, who we focus our attention on. You've been watching me, and you know what my priorities are. You know who comes first in the kingdom of God. So, you will always be near the poor, you'll always be with them, and you will always have the opportunity to share with them. . . .

The critical difference between Jesus's disciples and a middle-class church is precisely this: our lack of proximity to the poor. . . . The middle-class church doesn't know the poor and they don't know us. . . . So [we] merely speculate on the reasons for their condition, often placing the blame on the poor themselves. [1]

Jim says that "social location often determines biblical interpretation." No wonder many well-off Christians miss the emphasis on justice, simplicity, and equality throughout Scripture!

Let's take the meaning of solidarity with suffering even deeper. The outer poverty, injustice, and absurdity we see when we look around us mirrors our own inner poverty, injustice, and absurdity. The poor person outside is an invitation to the poor man or woman inside. As we learn compassion and sympathy for the brokenness of things, when we encounter the visible icon of the painful mystery in "the little ones," then we'll learn compassion and sympathy for our own "little one," the brokenness within.

Each time I was recovering from cancer, I had to sit with my own broken absurdity as I've done with others at the jail or hospital or sick bed. The suffering person's poverty is visible and extraverted; mine is invisible and interior, but just as real. I think that's why Jesus said we have to recognize Christ in the least of our brothers and sisters. It was for our redemption, our liberation, our healing—not just to "help" others and pad our spiritual resume.

When we see it over there, we become freed in here, and we also become less judgmental. I can't hate the person on welfare when I realize I'm on God's welfare. It all becomes one truth; the inner and the outer reflect one another. As compassion and sympathy flow out of us to any marginalized person, wounds are bandaged—both theirs and ours.

[1] Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (Harper Collins: 2005, 2006), 210-211.

Adapted from *Richard Rohr: Essential Teachings on Love*, eds. Joelle Chase and Judy Traeger (Orbis Books: 2018), 178.

Image Credit: *Oil Slick in the Timor Sea, September 2009* (detail), NASA Earth Conservatory, US Government.

For Further Study: Charles Eisenstein, *Sacred Economics: Money, Gift & Society in the Age of Transition* (Evolver Editions: 2011) /// Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability, Revised Edition* (Harper Business: 1993, 2010) /// Richard Rohr with John Bookser Feister, *Jesus' Plan for a New World: The Sermon on the Mount* (Franciscan Media: 1996) /// *The Souls of Poor Folk: Auditing America 50 Years After the Poor People's Campaign Challenged Racism, Poverty, the War Economy/Militarism and Our National Morality*, <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/audit/> /// Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (Harper Collins: 2005, 2006)