

St. Francis said,

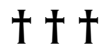
“Preach the Gospel at all times and, when necessary, use words.”

In that Spirit, I rise to preach, even as I believe what we need now *is not* more words,
but a new kind of love.



These are remarkable, deeply unsettling times.

Disturbing, disorienting times that conspire to leave us
as spiritually, mentally, and emotionally impoverished
as the “trampled needy” and “ruined poor”
were financially impoverished in the book of the prophet Amos.

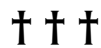


The slaughter of innocents continues in Gaza.

Searing, inter-communal clashes are tearing
South Sudan and Nigeria apart.

And here at home . . .

Little children were gunned down while at mass.
Charlie Kirk was murdered in broad daylight at a political rally.
Delta State University student, ‘Trey’ Reed, a young black man,
was found hanging from a tree on that campus.



We are still reeling from all the detritus,

lingering in the wake of this madness, and here before us
is this deeply unsettling, profoundly disorienting parable
to knock us on our backsides.

A manager caught in wrongdoing reduces debts to secure his future,
and Jesus commends his ‘shrewdness.’

Jesus commends his ‘shrewdness.’

What in the heaven is going on here? I’m so glad you asked.



Beloved, Jesus’ commendation of this manager signals to us
that there’s more going on here than meets the eye.

That maybe this parable is not just a straightforward lesson
on personal finances or ethics – if it’s that at all.

And that it’s certainly not the 1st century antecedent to

Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

This parable is something more.



New Testament scholar, Brandon Scott, contends that this parable is

“a social parable that exposes the complex relationships
and power struggles of the first century.”

And I say unto you . . .

this parable shocks us not merely because

it exposes the complex relationships and power struggles
of the first century,

but because it exposes the complex relationships which entangle us
and the power struggles in which we are engaged today.



In 237 words, that's 35 fewer words than Lincoln's Gettysburg Address,
in 237 words, Jesus offers a vision of the realm and reign of God that,
while it indicts and subverts what in many cases
was a corrupt and exploitative, oppressive and repressive
economic system in first century Palestine,
still indicts and subverts any system or regime or administration
that is corrupt and exploitative, oppressive and repressive.
And those who benefit from them.



Jesus accomplishes this in two ways.

Jesus upsets reductive binaries that foment division.

This parable does not present us with cruel masters
and powerless victims seeking vengeance,
but human beings locked in a tug-of-war
between conscience and complicity, covenant and compromise.
Much as we are now.

We are not just MAGA and progressives, whites and minorities,
gay and heterosexual, housed and unhoused,
healthy and infirm, rich and poor,
Palestinian and Israeli, Russian and Ukrainian,
woke and un-enlightened.

We are human beings locked in a tug-of-war
between what is right and what is easy,

between breaking down barriers to belonging
and conducting business as usual,
between truth and hypocrisy,
between faithful witness and silent complicity,
between the power of the Resurrection
and death-dealing modalities.

This is our moment of decision.

But not only that.

† † †

Jesus recasts 'shrewdness' as something even more powerful.

Was it shrewd of the manager to reduce debts to secure his future?

Certainly. Maybe even unethical.

Even so, Jesus recasts the manager's shrewdness in this way:

with each debt he forgives, the manager sows
a subversive, little mustard seed
that breaks the bond between power and justice,
a subversive, little mustard seed
that equates justice with vulnerability
and freedom with transparency.

In this parable, Jesus reveals that the realm and reign of God

is for the vulnerable and for masters and managers who do not get even.

Because justice is not about getting even or settling old scores

or proving other people wrong.

Justice is about living with courage, compassion, and openness . . .

Justice is about discerning that the freedom Jesus brings

is freedom to choose a new kind of love

even amid and especially because of uncertainty.

And, in these uncertain times, this is the moment when we decide

if this really is the land of the free and the home of the brave.

† † †

Last week, after the 10:30am service, Walter Miller told me

that our flag, out in the parking lot, was at half-staff.

Neither Fr. Greg nor I lowered it.

We don't know who did.

I imagine that you might guess the reason as surely as I did.

I did not know Charlie Kirk – only of him.

That he was profoundly influential and flawed, as we all are.

I detest that Charlie Kirk was murdered for his convictions,

even as I note that the Jesus in whom I hope, the skin I'm in,

and who I love makes it impossible for me to share those convictions.

And so, last week, our flag was at half-staff.

Not solemnly to observe the 24th anniversary of September 11th.

Not solemnly to observe the 62nd anniversary

of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church that killed

Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair,

Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley.

I imagine that you might guess the reason as surely as I did.

† † †

Now, while I mourn what happened to Charlie Kirk
and am praying for the repose of his soul and for his family in their grief,
you'll forgive me when I say
that I dare not memorialize,
I dare not canonize,
I dare not tokenize him

And that when I have seen American flags lowered to half-staff of late . . .

I have thought about September 11th and those four little girls.

I have mourned the over 300 mass shootings this year alone.

I have mourned what Charlie Kirk's murder reveals

about the state of our nation,

about the identities of the perpetrators of gun violence,

about the insecurity of our constitutionally

guaranteed and protected rights.

And I have lamented hearing two phrases, alarming words,

from Kirk's widow and scared white men:

"You do not know what you have unleashed."

"White men, fight back!"

† † †

But, we don't need more words. We need a new kind of love.

A new kind of love rooted (3x) in the eternal love of God.

We need a new kind of love.

A new kind of love

that is as old as the Scriptures and as young as a newborn's first breath.

A new kind of love

that defiantly clings to Jesus' vision of the realm and reign of God,
a vision that equates justice with vulnerability and freedom with transparency.

A new kind of love

that reminds us that we are not managers working for wages,
but Christians committed to a Baptismal Covenant.

A new kind of love

that rejects disagreement that is rooted in oppression and violence,
the denial of any person's humanity, and their right to exist.

A new kind of love

that empowers us to own this nation's bloody and bigoted past
and see how the past still imbrues the present.

A new kind of love

that undermines and frees us from the mentality
that the way things are, are the way they must be.

A new kind of love

that unclenches our fists and extends our arms.

A new kind of love

that finally, yes finally, inspires us to beat
our AR-15s into ploughshares
and our sniper rifles into pruning hooks.

A new kind of love

that inspires us to make "supplications, prayers, intercessions,
and thanksgivings" for everyone. Yes, everyone. A new kind of love (3x).



Beloved, this is the love that Jesus brings.

The love that is the North Star

to our justice-seeking, that is,

our moral courage and compassion and openness.

The love that is the basis for our freedom.

The love that is the subversive, little mustard seed

that will confound this present darkness.

The love that accompanies each of us as we

face and meet these uncertain times and sing with renewed meaning:

My hopes are built on nothing less

than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

When darkness veils his lovely face,

I rest on his unchanging grace;

in every high and stormy gale,

my anchor holds within the veil.

On Christ, the solid Rock I stand:

All other ground is sinking sand;

All other ground is sinking sand.

Amen.