

John Rohrs
Christ Church Sermons
2 Pentecost, May 25, 2008
Matthew 6:24-34

“The Two Economies”

“Don’t worry about your life,” Jesus says. “Don’t worry about what to eat, or what to wear. It’ll all work out. The Lord will provide.”

Now that sounds great, but let’s be honest – sometimes it is hard to believe. I mean, easy for him to say, Mr. Son of God, Mr. I Can Turn Water into Wine. For the rest of us, it’s not so easy. It’s hard not to worry. We’re probably in a recession, for goodness sakes! The housing market’s collapsed, food and gas prices are soaring, people are losing their jobs, the stock market’s up and down. How in the world can we not worry?

Well, before we totally write Jesus off, or at least before I do, let’s look at this gospel more closely. To help us, I want to draw on the work of Wendell Berry. He’s a writer and a farmer in Kentucky. He’s one of the real prophets of our time, if you ask me. Anyway, in one of his essays, Berry talks about the Two Economies. One is the man-made economy in which we buy and sell goods and services. It’s the economy that we see and participate in every day, the one that’s making us so nervous right now. The other is what Berry calls the Great Economy. It’s the original economy that God created, in which every person, every plant, every animal exists in relationship to each other. It’s the Circle of Life, if you will.

Of course, we all participate in both of these economies. We take part in the human economy when we go to work, go to the store, pay bills, whatever. But we also take part in the Great Economy. We rely on the fruit of the earth for food and water and shelter. We depend on plants and animals, and on each other, for our survival. We are all part of the web of creation.

All right, so we have these two economies. Now, I want us to think about them in relation to our gospel story. “Look at the birds of the air,” Jesus says. “Consider the lilies of the field. They don’t sow or reap; they don’t toil or spin. But even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.” In other words, Jesus says, look around you at the wealth of creation. Look at how God provides for the life of the world, from the birds, to the flowers, to all of us. Everything we need is here, in the Great Economy. “Don’t worry so much,” Jesus says, “but strive first for the Kingdom of God.”

You see, the Kingdom of God, Berry says, is another name for the Great Economy. The Kingdom of God is not a place; it’s a description of what life would be like if we lived as God intended us live, in harmony with one another and with the earth. And note that Jesus says strive first for the Kingdom of God – not only, but

first. Jesus knows that we need the human economy. We need to provide for ourselves, and care for our families. We need the human economy, but we don't need to put it first. That's where the danger lies.

If we put the human economy first, if we seek our security and happiness there, then we'll live in constant anxiety. We'll never really feel safe, or satisfied, because that economy is driven by scarcity. It's a scramble for limited resources and wealth, and there's always too little to gain and too much to lose. Try as we might, we can never have enough, and so we are left to worry.

Instead, Jesus says, seek first the Kingdom of God. Seek first the Great Economy, because that is where our true security lies. We know that because the Great Economy is driven not by scarcity but by abundance. We see that abundance whenever we stop our scrambling for a moment, and consider the wonder of God's creation. When we really look at the birds and the flowers, and we realize that everything we need is here already, and that if we care for the earth and care for each other, then there will be plenty to go around. That is the abundance of the Kingdom of God.

I want to close with a poem, also by Wendell Berry. It's always helpful to me when I get anxious, so I offer it to you. It's called "The Peace of Wild Things."

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

AMEN.