

Here's my sermon from today. (My guess is after reading this you'll "think" you know which political party I support, not knowing, of course, that as a preacher in the pulpit I'm politically neutral.)

## "The Needy And The Greedy"

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Menifee United Church of Christ

### Introduction

#### A GUY RUNS INTO A BAR.

A guy runs into a bar. The guy says to the bartender, "Quick! Pour me five shots of your best scotch!" The bartender pours them and the guy drinks them as fast as he can. The bartender says, "Wow! I've never seen anyone drink that fast!" The guy says, "Well, you'd drink that fast too if you had what I have." The bartender says, "Why, what do you have?" The guy says, "50 cents."

#### WHAT DOES SOCIETY THINK ABOUT THE POOR?

What does society think about the poor? Well, society, much of society anyway, seems to look down its nose at the poor. Society, much of society anyway, seems to want to blame the poor for being poor, which I believe is called blaming the victim. And society, much of society anyway, seems to want to ignore the poor. On the other hand: What does society think about the rich? Oh, society, much of society anyway, seems to love the rich. Society, much of society anyway, seems to revere the rich. And society, much of society anyway, seems to worship the rich. Jesus, though, does not look down his nose at the poor and does not worship the rich. As far as we know, Jesus himself was not rich, but was poor. At least Jesus was materially poor. Of course, Jesus was spiritually rich.

#### A Biblical Example

#### JESUS SUPPORTS THE POOR, NOT THE RICH.

Jesus supports the poor, not the rich. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus goes to the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Lazarus sits at the table with Jesus, Martha serves them dinner, and Mary anoints Jesus' feet with perfume. Judas, the disciple who would betray Jesus, says: Why wasn't this perfume sold for lots of money and the money given to the poor? (We're told he said that because he kept the common purse and stole the money that was given to the poor.) Jesus says to Judas, who was picking on Mary: Leave her alone, she poured perfume on my feet to prepare me for burial. (Which, unfortunately, would happen in a little more than a week.) Then Jesus says: You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.

#### WHAT DID JESUS MEAN BY THAT?

What did Jesus mean by that? "You always have the poor with you." Well, Jesus knew that there would always be the needy, because Jesus knew that there would always be the greedy, like Judas. Jesus knew that the greedy would always try to get out of paying their taxes, and stick the needy (and the middle class) with the bill, which is why he says in the Gospels: Render unto Caesar (or the government), that which is Caesar's (or the government's); in other words, pay your taxes. And Jesus knew that the greedy would always take more than their fair share and leave the needy with little, which is why he says in Luke: Blessed are you who are poor...But woe to you who are rich. Not that all the rich are bad, and not that all the poor are good. But Jesus seemed to have a problem with the rich and Jesus seemed to have an affinity for the poor.

#### Another Biblical Example

## PSALM 126 IS A PLEA TO GOD.

Psalm 126 is a plea to God. The Psalmist probably wants God to restore the blessings of Israel. But it sure sounds like it could apply to the poor. The Psalmist says, "Restore our fortunes, O Lord." The Psalmist says, "May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy." And the Psalmist says, "Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves."

## WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE POOR?

Why are some people poor? I don't know. But some poor people end up homeless. And we've had more than a year's experience of allowing homeless people to sleep inside our church and to sleep outside our church. And it seems to me that there are several reasons why people end up homeless. Some people are homeless because they choose to be homeless; there seems to be a certain freedom in homelessness. Some people are homeless because they are unemployed. Some people are homeless because their spouse or partner is abusive or kicked them out of the house. Some people are homeless because they have drug or alcohol problems. Some people are homeless because they have mental problems. And some people are homeless because they seem to be lost within themselves, or maybe you could say they seem to be lost souls. It's for all of those reasons, and probably many more, that people end up poor and homeless.

## A Modern-Day Example

### I WENT TO THE DENTIST THIS PAST WEEK.

I went to the dentist this past week. I had to get a broken tooth fixed. As I was sitting in the dentist chair, with my dentist's hand in my mouth, I had a whimsical thought. I thought: I wish I had enough money to hire somebody to go to the dentist for me. I know that's not possible. But then I thought: healthcare is the great class equalizer. The poor, if they can afford it, have to go to the dentist or the doctor themselves. While the rich could afford to hire somebody to go to the dentist or the doctor for them, but that's not how it works. So they have to go to the dentist or the doctor themselves, too. (Granted the rich have the option of having a dentist and a doctor on staff, living in their mansion. An option the poor don't have.) And then I thought (because in the dentist waiting room they had on coverage of Nancy Reagan's pre-funeral): death is the great class equalizer, too. The poor die for themselves. And the rich can't hire somebody to die for them, so they die for themselves, too. (You know, except in wartime, when the kids of the rich don't go to war, unless they choose to. And the kids of the poor sometimes can't afford to do anything but go to war.)

### SHOULDN'T HEALTHCARE BE A RIGHT FOR EVERYONE?

Shouldn't healthcare be a right for everyone? Since it is the great class equalizer. I mean, the poor need healthcare just as much as the rich need healthcare. But the rich can afford healthcare and the poor can't always afford healthcare. If healthcare should be a right for everyone, because we all need our health, why do some of our representatives in Washington keep voting to repeal the Affordable Care Act? As I understand it the Affordable Care Act has helped millions of the poor and the middle class to have healthcare who couldn't afford it before. For insight into all this we turn to an unlikely source.

## A Contemporary Comment

### STEPHEN COLBERT WEIGHS IN ON THE POOR.

Stephen Colbert weighs in on the poor. Stephen Colbert calls himself, "America's most influential

Catholic.” Still, why on earth would I quote a late night comedian about the poor. Well, because what he has to say is pretty profound. Stephen Colbert says, if we’re going to be a “Christian nation” that doesn’t help the poor, then we have to “pretend that Jesus was just as selfish as we are,” or we have to admit that Jesus commanded us “to love the poor and serve the needy” and then admit that “we just don’t want to do it.”

#### DOES OUR NATION NOT WANT TO HELP THE POOR?

Does our nation not want to help the poor? Well, based on the actions of some of our elected leaders, our politicians, it sure seems to be true. Some politicians seem to be modern-day Judases. Or maybe modern-day reverse Robin Hoods. They take from the needy and give to the greedy. Some politicians cut welfare for the poor, while increasing corporate welfare for the rich. Some politicians pass legislation prohibiting the poor from using Food Stamps to buy lobster - is that really a problem? - and then they cut taxes on the so-called “job creators,” even when those job creators ship jobs that they’ve created to other countries. And some politicians say they support women staying home with their small children and then they require poor, single moms with small children to go to work to get their welfare benefits. (Now I’m not saying it isn’t a good thing for welfare recipients to work. I’m just saying I just wish some politicians would speak out of just one side of their mouth.) So, given the way some politicians treat the poor, is this a Christian nation? We report. You decide.

#### Conclusion

#### I HAD THE CHANCE LAST WEEK TO HELP A POOR FAMILY.

I had the chance last week to help a poor family. I won’t go into details, but they had pretty much lost everything. So, I gave them enough money to spend a couple nights at a motel, to get some food, and to buy some gas. The mom was very emotional. The dad was very thankful. I was able to do that thanks to the generosity of this congregation - you all, or, since we’re in Southern California, y’all - because I took the money from the Pastor’s Fund, which members of this congregation contribute to.

#### WAS THAT THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

Was that the right thing to do? I believe it was. I believe Stephen Colbert would say it was. And I believe, more importantly, that Jesus would say it was, too. That’s what churches are all about. Or at least that’s what churches are supposed to be all about. That’s what this church is all about. Helping the needy. (We figure the greedy can take care of themselves.) Now, we could just come here on Sunday mornings and sing songs and pray prayers and hear scripture and listen to a nice message and then all go home for the rest of the week, feeling all uplifted and righteous. But this church exists for more than just one hour a week on Sunday morning. This church exists for the other 167 hours of the week also. As you know, this church exists to offer help to the helpless. This church exists to offer hope to the hopeless. And this church exists to offer support to the poor. Maybe not by helping some guy pay for five shots of scotch. But by helping a family in need, as Jesus would want us to, because he knew, “You always have the poor with you.”

#### Closing Prayer

Let us pray...

God of Love,

Help us to offer help to the helpless.

Help us to offer hope to the hopeless.

And help us to offer support to the poor.

Now and forevermore.

By the power of the Holy Spirit.

And in the name of Jesus.

Amen.