



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

***September 26, 2010***

***Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time***

***Mark Nygard***

RCL: Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15; Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

LM: Amos 6:1a, 4-7; Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31

Not very wise of Jeremiah, most folks of his day would have said—investing in an enemy-occupied field at the very moment their armies are besieging Jerusalem. It seems truly unlikely that Israel will ever own the land again. Not very wise, Jeremiah. This appears to be blind hope flying in the face of all reason.

But in his purchase, Jeremiah obeys a word from the Lord. God commands an optimistic kind of action at a pessimistic kind of time to show God's people that God has a stake in Israel and that "houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land" (v. 15). Jeremiah invests in a future that can only come from God.

With 852 million hungry people in our world and the population rising fast, some consider this a pretty pessimistic time. What can we possibly do in the face of such overwhelming need? Nevertheless, it is God's own command that even in the face of daunting odds, we invest ourselves in their future. We don't necessarily know how best to accomplish it, but we do this because God calls us to help our neighbor in need. Not very wise, many would say. Better to invest in ourselves and our own futures. But we Christians, by God's own command, are so bold as to stake our resources on the hope of a better day for those who are disenfranchised.

Other Scripture lessons for this Sunday also are about investment. Amos cries his "alas" for those who are materially rich but have so little investment in Joseph (God's chosen people) that they do not grieve for the nation's ruin. Their attention is so absorbed with expensive bedroom furniture, banquets of veal and mutton, the latest musical hits, body health aids, and fine wines that they have none left for the plight of those facing destruction. It is difficult not to sense in these verses a judgment on the privileged preoccupation of many in this country with limitless improvement in their material lifestyle while those who are less privileged die.

The rich man in Luke's story invests in purple and fine linen and feasts sumptuously each day. He is unconcerned about the poor man with sores (lacking health care?) who lay at his gate (homeless?) wishing to eat the crumbs beneath the rich man's table (hungry!) Nor does he think about the inequality between their conditions. All his investment is immediate, pragmatic, and egocentric. The story is not interested in further speculation on the rich man's moral character, nor does it ask for a system of



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metaphysics for the universe that will explain the outcome. Rather, it critiques the rich man's investment of his attention, resources, and affection in himself.

The text from 1 Timothy also warns us against such investments. Appealing to reason, the passage reminds us that life's end removes wealth's temporary privileges. Appealing to morality, the passage shows that desiring to be rich is dangerous because it leads to a destructive temptation, one that can even undermine a person's own faith. A better path involves being content with tending to more modest personal needs and investing oneself in the life of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, which yields the kind of fruit that benefits the "little ones" of God's world. Righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness impact positively on the lives of those in need. In glaring contrast, the urgent need for a rapidly growing portfolio and limitless retirement security leads to heartless exploitation of vulnerable people.

The psalm options are clear about where God is invested. In Psalm 91 God comforts those who count on him (as opposed to their wealth?), who look to his name and call upon him, who love him. And in Psalm 146 God's benefits are for those in need—people who are oppressed, hungry, imprisoned, blind, and bowed down, as well as strangers, orphans, and widows. How surprising to discover "the righteous" listed among these needy ones, as if that is the natural place for anyone in right relationship with one's God. Here is God's investment. Here is ours as well, as people who belong to God.

### *Children's Time*

I'll bet there are some children here who have a savings account. Anybody here? [Conversation time.] Or maybe your parents have a savings account. A savings account is a place where you "invest" your money, using it to help somebody else so that they can share an increase with you. [Produce an old savings passbook or a savings statement from the bank.] Do you see how my money is growing by helping somebody? That's called an investment. When God came to earth in Jesus, he "invested" himself in people who needed him. We invest ourselves when we spend our lives for people who need help.

### *Musical Suggestions*

This would be a good time to present *Lazarus*, Bread for the World's musical on hunger and poverty, based on this week's gospel passage. It can be offered at full length during worship, or excerpts can be sung at various points in the service. Copies of scores and recordings are available from the BFW national office or at [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org).

Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love—The Presbyterian Hymnal 367

Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service—Lutheran Book of Worship 423



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**You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore—With One Voice-A Lutheran Resource for  
Worship 784**

**Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year C  
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