**First Reading Amos 5:6-7, 10-15**

*Amos was a herdsman by profession and a prophet by God’s call. During a time of great prosperity in the northern kingdom of Israel, the prophet speaks to the wealthy upper class. He warns his listeners that fulfilling God’s demand for justice brings blessing, while corruption and oppression incur God’s wrath.*

6 Seek the Lord and live, or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire, and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it. 7Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground! 10They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth. 11Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. 12For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins— you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate. 13Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time. 14Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. 15Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

**Psalm 90:12-17**

12So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. 13Return, O Lord; how long will you tarry? Be gracious to your servants. 14Satisfy us by your steadfast love in the morning; so shall we rejoice and be glad all our days. 15Make us glad as many days as you afflicted us and as many years as we suffered adversity. 16Show your servants your works, and your splendor to their children. 17May the graciousness of the Lord our God be upon us; prosper the work of our hands; prosper our handiwork.

**Second Reading Hebrews 4:12-16**

*We cannot hide our thoughts, desires, and actions from God, to whom we are, because he also experienced them. Therefore we can approach the throne of grace to receive divine mercy from Christ.*

12Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and

intentions of the heart. 13And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. 14Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**Gospel Mark 10:17-31**

*Jesus has been teaching his disciples about what is most valued in God’s eyes. Now, a conversation with a rich man brings his message home to the disciples in a way that is surprising but unforgettable.*

17As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’ ” 20He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 21Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. 23Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” 24And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” 26They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” 27Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” 28Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 29Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal

life. 31But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

**Sermon**

A few days ago, my child started talking about wanting to visit heaven, of course, because there are some people there she loved and she misses them. She mentioned something she wanted to take with her, I can’t remember what it was. So, I told her we can’t take anything with us from here to heaven. She said, “will our house be in heaven?” I said “no, nothing from this life can be taken to heaven.” She said, “Can’t I even take a frisbee?” I said no. And then it occurred to me that this is a reminder we all need a few times throughout our lives…we can’t take any of this stuff with us.

Some of you may be at an age to remember the comedian George Carlin who had a great bit on stuff. Carlin says the whole meaning of life has become trying to find a place for your stuff. Our houses are just a place for our stuff…a pile stuff with a cover on it…a place to keep our stuff while we go out and get more stuff. Carlin talks about storage spaces…a whole industry based on keeping an eye on YOUR stuff.

In the gospel passage today, Jesus speaks with a man with a lot of stuff. The young man approaches Jesus with a question…what must I do to inherit eternal life?” But he walks away disappointed. This is interesting because I don’t think this happens very often. People who approach Jesus often walk away healed or with their life changed or frustrated and angry in the case of some religious leaders. But this young man walks away “shocked” and “grieving.” What is it that Jesus said that made him feel this way?

The young man’s question was about inheriting eternal life. While we often think of eternal life as going to heaven after we die, this question is better understood as having to do with this life, particularly experiencing the presence of God and the life God intends for us. Jesus starts with the law, the commandments…do not murder, do not commit adultery, etc. The man says he has kept these commandments throughout his life. Then Jesus tells him to sell his stuff and give the money to the poor and then follow Jesus. Whoa. The man had A LOT of stuff. That was gonna hurt!

And what about us? How do we feel about the idea of selling all our stuff and giving the money to the poor? I’ll be the first to say that I feel a bit hesitant. So, I can’t stand up here and tell you all to go sell all your stuff and give the money to the poor if I’m not willing to sell all MY

stuff and give the money to the poor. I’m sure in some cases, we wouldn’t mind selling stuff so we could have the money to use instead of the stuff. But that’s not what Jesus said. He said sell stuff, give the money to the poor. What are we to do with this?

The first is to admit it…we really like our stuff and our money. Our stuff entertains us…it comforts us…it gives us a bit of happiness. When we save up to buy something, it gives us a sense of accomplishment because WE worked hard for it…our first car, our first house, ect. And as far as OUR money, we’re pretty fond of that too. We worked for it. We need enough to pay for everything we have to pay for. We need enough to live on when we retire. We should be able to do whatever we want with it because its ours. No one should tell us what to do with our money.

Money and possessions are a hard but important topic for us to discuss in the church. After all, Jesus’ demands seem kind of extreme. But please notice something about what Jesus says. Jesus’ first response in reference to having eternal life is follow the commandments, which are bad things we shouldn’t do to harm others. Ok, yes, bad things that harm others, we can agree to that. But there is another aspect of God’s law…it is making sure everyone has what they need, caring for those who are lacking. You see, the experience of living in God’s ways isn’t just about avoiding harm, it’s also about sharing of the resources that God gave us in this world.

I’ve said this before, but I’ll say it again, so we don’t forget. The Jewish law didn’t only cover what not to do. It also gave instructions for what to do…it gave instruction to care for those who fell into poverty because they couldn’t work or they lost their source of support, like and orphan or a widow. It also called for a Day of Jubilee to be celebrated, when all slaves were freed, all debts were erased, and all land was returned to whomever it originally belonged. This provided a clean slate. Whether it was ever celebrated, we don’t know. But we do know that it was God’s intention to prevent inequality.

Last week we were reminded that God created us, humanity, for relationship… relationship with God and with one another. This week we also hear that God’s intention for our life with one another is that we be able to let go of some of our stuff and share it with those in need. Our faith is not about following a bunch of rules; it is about living in peace with one another, recognizing that our life is a shared life with those around us. When there are

people in need in our communities, in our world, that is our concern if we have more than we need to live.

Our God is a God who has given generously. God created us human beings to be in relationship with us. And regardless of how bad we’ve been at holding up our end of the relationship, God has continued to give generously to us. God has given us this world, this beautiful creation to care for and enjoy. God has even given us Jesus to teach us, to die for us, to rise and live with us. Through the risen Christ God gives us faith and love, forgiveness and peace, strength and healing that we need every day. We live and enjoy the goodness of life because of all that God gives to us.

Whenever we act in these generous, giving ways toward those in need, we will know the presence of God in our midst. It is our generous God that enables us to give of what we have for the sake of those who do not have. The disciples gave up everything to follow Jesus; they remind him of this fact in verse 28. I don’t want anyone to go thinking that Jesus’ response in verses 29 and following promises that those who follow him will receive lots of stuff in this life. Instead, following Jesus through a life of giving will result in a different kind of life…possibly some hardship, possibly some new friendships, but most certainly the experience of what God intended for this life, which is of far more value than any of the money or stuff that only belong to this world.

As we watch the reports of the impact of Hurricanes Helene and Milton on our southern states, we certainly find ourselves pondering what is most important in life. That may be a meaningful, fruitful reflection on our own lives and our relationship to our stuff. At the same time, however, Jesus is once again calling us to see a need and respond to the need as we are able. Ours is a shared life…ours are shared resources…God’s gives us all we have for the good of all who live. Amen.