

“The Soul of Money: Change the Dream”  
Luke 19:1-10

In her book, *The Soul of Money*, Lynne Twist tells about her experiences of working with Achuar people of the Amazon. They helped her and others in her organization to see the need to change the modern dream for our world that is based on the myths of scarcity that there is not enough, more is better, and that is the way it is. Here is a video from the group that was formed to help change the dream of the modern world in order to protect the Amazon: <https://vimeo.com/327105462>

The Amazon’s forests hold 100 billion tons of carbon in the lignin of its trees. Furthermore, the Amazon circulates more than 20 percent of the world’s oxygen. There are so many amazing facts about the Amazon and our need for it to stay healthy to support life here on earth. It is really amazing to see people working together to protect this incredible source of life for all of us.

Changing our modern dream is not easy! Most people have the desire to live in gratitude, with generosity, and with openness to what God might bring to us. Yet, the realities of life seem to limit us. How we imagine life from an early age becomes a hindrance to our sense of freedom, especially when it comes to money. When the myths of scarcity take root in us, they also replace our dreams for a life of sharing with dreams of fear and hoarding.

Our Bible story is about such an experience of transformation from a dream of scarcity to God’s dream of sharing and abundance. The main character in the story from the Gospel of Luke is a tax collector by the name of Zacchaeus. The scarcity-driven dream of “more is better” had taken a hold of him that he was willing to cheat his own people out of their money. At the time of Jesus, tax collectors were seen as collaborators with the Roman Empire and its occupation of the land and its people. They were agents of oppression. They not only collected the tax which the Roman government required, but they also added to the bill to get themselves a piece of the pie. They were legal crooks. Zacchaeus was rich, and his wealth came as a result of exploiting others. His description as a short man might be seen as a metaphor for his diminished spirit.

Biblical scholar Verity Jones notes that, “To handle the vast sums, publicans (tax collectors) like Zacchaeus formed associations something like modern corporations, each headed by a lead bidder and a few officers backed by many investors. Having bid to deliver to Rome a specified amount from a province, they worked with local officials, who collected within their own districts. Taxes on agriculture and import customs were subject to unpredictable fluctuations, so getting the numbers right was a tricky business. Publicans were also moneylenders, speculators, and contractors supplying material for the army. Such enterprises provided opportunities for cooking the books, commodities speculation, side deals, graft, and extortion to defraud Rome, local officials, fellow investors, and average citizens.”

This gives us some perspective as to why Zacchaeus did not have a good reputation in his community. Zacchaeus had a powerful position in a very important town: Jericho. There were at least two major highways in Israel at that time and one of them went right through Jericho. Jericho was the customs station, and thousands of Jews came through there and they had to pay taxes on every cow, calf, and camel that came through customs. So, with his position as chief publican who had the contract for tax collection, Zacchaeus took advantage of the Jews and exploited their religious celebrations to collect money. The story took place around Passover time which meant that tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims were coming down from Galilee, going around Samaria because it was unsafe, and coming through the toll booth at Jericho and paying their taxes.

Jesus also was making this trip, from up north in Galilee, coming south through Jericho to Jerusalem. Jesus had every reason to resent Zacchaeus and to continue to let him be alienated from others. He might have seemed like the last person to want to change!!!

Let's listen to the story from Luke 19:1-10:

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. <sup>2</sup>A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup>He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. <sup>4</sup>So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. <sup>5</sup>When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup>So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. <sup>7</sup>All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." <sup>8</sup>Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." <sup>9</sup>Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup>For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

In God's grace, all our expectations are reversed, and all people are restored to their original connection to life. Jesus did the unthinkable by deciding to go to the house of this man to have a meal with him. The table communion Jesus shared with Zacchaeus was a radical act of generosity of spirit which allowed this man to respond with that same sense of generosity of spirit.

Not only did Jesus go to Zacchaeus' home, but he also told him that he was going to stay with him. The word "meno" in the New Testament Greek always shows how God dwells among us to transform our lives and our world. Jesus' visit to the home of Zacchaeus was not going to be a casual one. It was about the presence of God dwelling in Zacchaeus' home and heart. This dwelling presence radically changed Zacchaeus' life. He repented from his old ways of greed and gave away half of his possessions. His dream for life became that of sharing, generosity, compassion, and love.

This story gives me so much hope for all of us! Nothing is impossible for God! We can all be healed from our money wounds. We can all be captured by a different dream for life

where sufficiency is the truth of our daily lives. What we all need is enough experiences of being grounded and rooted in God's generosity and abundance where we see ourselves as so connected to life, to others, and to God. The myths of scarcity are subconscious for most of us. The work of the spiritual journey is to make sufficiency part of our subconscious. The good news is that we don't have to do this on our own. Our work is to be open enough for God to do this work in us.

Where do you experience God's abundance in your life? When do you dream of it? When do you extend that kind of experience or dream to others?

Buckminster Fuller once said, "everyone has the perfect gift to give the world – and if each of us is freed up to give the gift that is uniquely ours to give, the world will be in total harmony."

The following is a prayer practice from Mark E. Thibodeaux, from his book, Reimagining the Ignatian Examen.

"In my own Examen (prayer practice), then, I praydream—prayerfully daydream. I concretely imagine how I might approach the next twenty-four hours if I were to be God's hands and feet and voice. I allow God to dream a dream within me of the wonderful ways I can be a channel of God's faith, hope, and love for the world. These praydreams give me the wisdom and the passion to carry out God's marvelous plans for me in the coming day."

We will take a few moments to do just that. We will praydream. Aligning with God's vision of abundance and generosity in the world, we are invited to imagine with God what our lives are to be for the rest of this day as the hands, feet, and voice of God in the world...Amen.