SERMON NOTES — January 26, 2025

Jesus' Inauguration, Part 1 (Next week is Part 2)

It takes place in his hometown of Nazareth, his home synagogue, on the Sabbath. Sabbath is a reset in our relationships every seven days, when we are resting, retooling, and equal before God.

Sabbath Year, "sabbatical": taking extended rest every seven years for refreshment and retooling.

Jubilee year, "the year of the Lord's favor," prescribed in Leviticus 25 and prophesied in Isaiah 61: every seven-times-seven year, roughly every 50 years, there is a complete societal reset. All debts canceled. All property and wealth redistributed.

Jesus reads Isaiah 61 and says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He is saying that he will be the embodiment of the Jubilee Year coming into the world. All this past year, we've been talking about the Good News of God's reign as Jesus bringing God's very different *politics* into the world. Now, in this year of Luke's Gospel, we can talk about the Good News of God's reign as Jesus bringing Go's very different *economics* into the world.

Luke's Gospel has a special emphasis on economic relationships. The majority of his special material — passages unique to his Gospel — have to do with rich people and their relationship to the poor.

What about the Inauguration of Donald Trump this week? It's never fair to compare any person's economics with God's very different economics, but doesn't this graphic present cause for worry? The note pointing to Elon Musk says, "Since Trump's election on Nov. 5, Musk's net worth surged 61 percent, rising from 264B to 426B." Is the United States heading deeper into what's called "plutocracy," meaning government by and for the rich? Further away from democracy, government by and for the people? Comparison isn't necessarily fair, but I believe we are called to tentatively do so nonetheless. We are called to measure our economics with God's to advocate for change.

The prophecy of Jubilee which Jesus came to embody gives us the measure: how can every person be equal before God in their worth? Jesus treated everyone as of equal worth. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus will have more to say about equity in terms of economics, rich and poor.

Introducing a modern tool for evaluating economic equity: the GINI Coefficient. It's a mathematical measurement scored from zero to one: A score of zero represents every person in a group having the same wealth — in other words, the elusive Jubilee conditions. A score of one represents one person holding all the wealth and everyone else nothing.

The GINI Coefficent is highest on a *worldwide* basis because of the great disparity of wealth between nations themselves. Worldwide it reached its highest level of equality in 2000 at .72. Currently, the global GINI score is .67

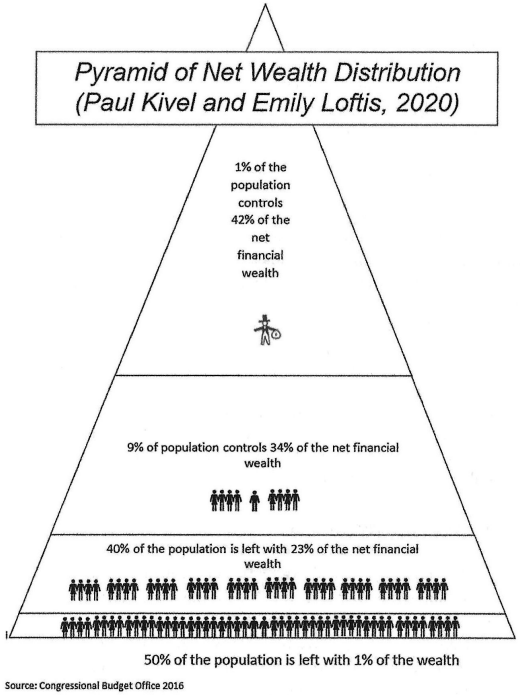

Figure 2. Pyramid of Net Wealth Distribution (reproduced by permission of Paul Kivel).

Compare *nations*. Among the lowest scores, those with the highest measure of equity, are Scandinavian countries: Norway .263, Finland .277, Sweden .298. Of special interest to this congregation of Danish heritage are the scores of Danish related regions: Faroe Islands .210, Iceland .250, Denmark .283.

Here's the rub: the United States currently holds the highest GINI score of all the larger industrialized nations at .413. We have the greatest gap between rich and poor? What will it take to get better? Can we learn from the Scandinavian countries what economic policies might make things more equitable?

Here's the question for us: would we flourish more in a country that more equitable? Can we contribute to making that happen, guided by the Jubilee economics of God's reign in Jesus Christ?