**SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES** — September 28, 2025

Learning to see my privilege as a white male in a racist and sexist society has been a serious, lifelong task for me as an adult. Another thing that tends to be invisible to us who live in relative prosperity is the privilege of wealth. This morning's parable is about the invisibility to the rich of the Great Chasm between wealthy and poor. The rich man, in his opulent lifestyle of accumulating wealth, has been creating a Great Chasm throughout his life, which he does not see until the afterlife. And what he comes to see is how this chasm has isolated him from the help of others for eternity.

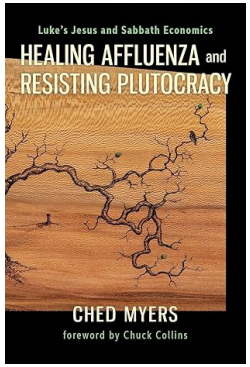
Charles Dickens write a very similar parable in his well-known and beloved story of Ebenezer Scrooge, in *A Christmas Carol*. Only, instead of a great isolating chasm, Dickens portrays Scrooge as forging chains that bind and burden him, but yet are invisible to him in this life. It is a visit from his former business partner which begins to show him the truth. Marley informs Scrooge that he has had seven more years to work on his chains.

**Marley's ghost in chains visits Scrooge on Christmas Eve**

Scrooge is bewildered. Chains? Why? Haven't they been good business men? To which Marley replies:

> "Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business! . . . At this time of the rolling year," the spectre said, "I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted *me*!"

Luke, in this middle section of his Gospel, portrays Jesus as trying to teach us similar lessons through six encounters with rich men, whether in parables or in-person. Today's parable of the rich man and Lazarus is the fourth such encounter. And this one provides what Ched Myers refers to as a Catechism of the Great Chasm. (Myers is my chief guide through this middle portion of Luke Gospel, in his book *Healing Affluenza and Resisting Plutocracy: Luke's Jesus and Sabbath Economics*.)




Myers begins his chapter on this parable by citing studies of the wealth gap through history, such as:

- In the Roman Empire of the First Century, the top 1.5% of the population held 20% of the wealth
- In 2016 America, the top 1% of the population in wealth held 38% of the wealth

That's right, the Great Chasm is twice as bad in America's under America's capitalist economics. And it's been that way from the start. Charles Dickens, writing in the first 100 years after his fellow countryman Adam Smith founded capitalism, devoted much of his work to critiquing the devastating moral problems of the Great Chasm. Jesus and Dickens, 18 centuries apart were trying to help humankind see that the Great Chasm is one of the greatest problems that keeps us in chains from becoming what God created us to be, joint caretakers with God in caring for creation and each other. The common welfare has always been our true business.

Siblings in Christ, as followers of Jesus, who ushers in the reign of God and God's economics, we must learn to stop *worshiping* capitalism and seek to *fix* it. As citizens in a democracy, it is well within our purview to advocate for economic policies with the concrete results of shrinking that chasm. (Perhaps we've recently gone through an historical catechism and not learned: the Great Depression. Did the widening Great Chasm between rich and poor in the 1920's lead to the Great Depression. We responding by shrinking of the gap between rich and poor from the 1930's to the 1970's — until Reaganomics widened the gap again ever since. Let's take to heart the lessons of this morning's parables, from both Jesus and Charles Dickens, and learn to make humankind our business. To make the common welfare our business.