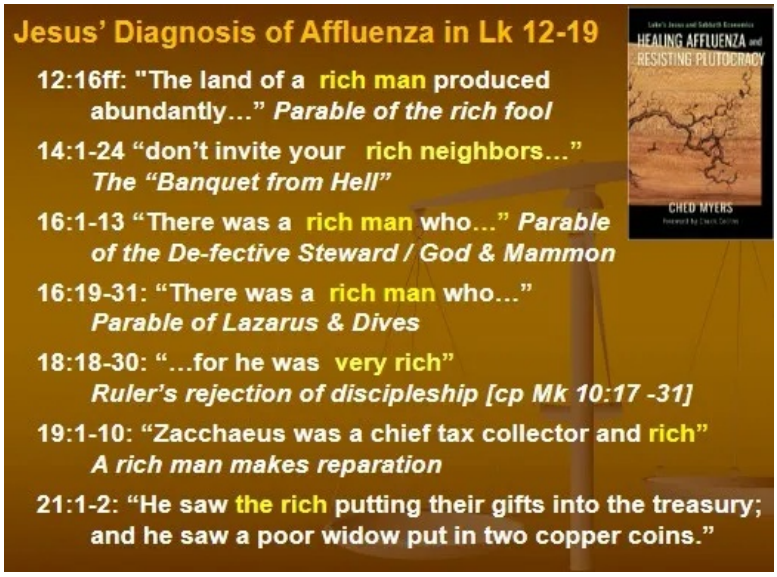
SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — November 16, 2025

A Change in the Lectionary

Fifty years ago, the Gospel assigned for today, the second-to-last Sunday in the Church Year, was Luke 19:11-28 — see page 30 in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Green Hymnal). The Revised Common Lectionary, which we now use, came out in 1994. Today other Lutherans will be reading Luke 21:5-19 as the Gospel (see the bottom of page 29 in Green Hymnal. It's a passage known as the Little Apocalypse because Jesus correctly prophesies the destruction of the Temple and most of Jerusalem (which happened a generation later in 70 AD).



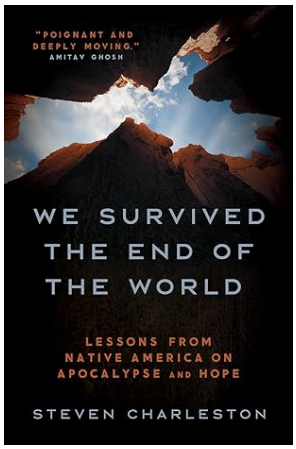
I've chosen to go back fifty years to Luke 19:11-28 because it the fitting Little Apocalypse to end our reading of the middle part of Luke's Gospel, the six encounters with rich men (outlined to the right). After teaching the dangers of wealth through the first five, we finally meet a rich man who does the right thing. Salvation comes to Zacchaeus's house when he not only generously shares his wealth but also makes reparations for the wealth he wrongly took from others.

While still sitting at the table with Zacchaeus and his guests, Jesus tells the Parable of the Pounds, about a nobleman-about-to-be-made-king who leaves some of his money with servants while going to petition the emperor. It's easy to see the brutally of this king at the end, when he slaughters everyone who tried to oppose him. In fact, they knew a just such a king in their recent past. Notice how close the following events are mimicked in the parable:

> Not long after (the death of their father, Herod the Great), both Archelaus and Antipas traveled to Rome to ask Caesar Augustus to adjudicate their rival claims to kingship. During the months the emperor was deliberating, a delegation of fifty Judean leaders traveled to Rome for an audience with him, opposing Archelaus because of his cruelty to his own people. The emperor eventually decided in favor of Archelaus, confirming his rule over half the Herodian territory, now called the "ethnarchy" of Judea; Philip and Antipas each received a quarter of the remaining half. Archelaus, in turn, retaliated by killing those who had tried to oust him. Less than a decade later, after the census of Quirinius (a watershed event that Luke acknowledges in 2:1-2), Archelaus was removed by the emperor and exiled for excessive incompetence and violence; the province of Judaea was then placed under direct Roman rule.

But the other actions of the king in this parable — giving ten pounds to ten servants — might be hard for us to see as wrong, because making money off of money is something applauded in our capitalist system. I've given sermons on Matthew's version of this parable (Matt 25:14-30) which praises the first two servants, who made money with their master's money, and lamented the third who did not. The people who followed Jesus would see it the opposite. They were kept poor by predatory lending ("loan sharking") by people like those first two servants. Zacchaeus had been one of those persons and had come to see the error of his ways, making reparations. The master rewarding the first two servants and punishing the third would have been seen as cruel, too. His proclaiming that "to all those who have, more will be given, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away" is a fancy way of saying, "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Indigenous Wisdom to the Rescue



Something that is helping to cure my blindness to the sometimes cruelty of capitalism is to realize that Jesus and his Jewish people were indigenous people oppressed in other people's empires. What helped them survive all the terrible loss was the indigenous wisdom from their God, which they kept alive in community, perfected by Jesus their Messiah.

A book that helps me see things from that perspective is *We Survived the End of the World*, by Choctaw elder Steve Charleston. It is about how the indigenous people of America survived the Apocalypse of losing their land to Europeans, often with harsh brutality. Here, for example, is a letter from President Thomas Jefferson to Governor William Henry Harrison, outlining a strategy to take Indian lands basically through predatory lending:

> We wish to draw the Indians to agriculture. . . . When they withdraw themselves to the culture of a small piece of land, they will perceive how useless to them are their extensive forests, and be willing to pare them off in exchange for necessaries for their farms and families. To promote this disposition to exchange lands . . . we shall push our trading houses and be glad to see them run up a debt because when these debts get beyond what the Indians can pay, they will become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands. . . . In this way our settlement will gradually circumscribe and approach the Indians, and they will either incorporate with us as citizens of the United States or remove beyond the Mississippi River. . . . Should any tribe be foolhardy enough to take up the hatchet, the seizing the whole country of that tribe and driving them across the Mississippi as the only condition of peace would be an example to others and a furtherance of our final consolidation.

Charleston tells the story of Shawnee prophet Tenskwatawa (1775-1836) who sought to unite his people under these principles. Charleston writes:

> Tenskwatawa's visions went on to reveal the ethical and moral precepts that should shape a believer's life. No more war or killing between Native nations. Truth telling in all negotiations. Respect for all women. Reverence for the earth and all her creatures. Above all, a deep communal sense of life and creation. Private ownership of land was to be repudiated. No more land was to be ceded or sold. Native people should hold all things in common and share whatever they had with one another. Generosity was to be a cornerstone of the new faith as it restored ancient values and traditions. (61-62)

Compare this to Luke's sequel to the Gospel in Acts:

> **Acts 2:42-45:** They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43]Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. [44]All who believed were together and had all things in common; [45]they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Siblings in Christ, we are to be that people today, persuading our fellow citizens that there's a better way than that of our current leadership. A way of generosity. Let's be part of God's bringing salvation to the house of America.