Logo

Description automatically generated

Just Peace Sunday, 2022

Texts: Luke 16:1-13 and Ephesians 2:14-22

Deborah Krause, President and Professor of New Testament, Eden Theological Seminary

A theme that connects the texts for this Sunday is that of the household. In both texts this social structure is referenced as a socio-economic system and as a metaphor. While there is a difference between the 1st century CE Hellenistic structure of the household/family and households within different contexts of the early 21st century, all of these structures bear in common that they are systems in which power can be organized in ways that make for peace and justice or in ways that make for domination and oppression. In this sense, both of the texts bear excellent reflection material for preaching and teaching about ways to practice and foster Just Peace.

An experience in common among almost all people on earth is that we abide within the structure of a household. Home, house, family (in Greek rooted in the same term) are spaces in which forces of culture and economy come to bear to shape us and hold us. Jesus’ preaching and teaching is marked by regular critiques of family and household as violent structures that do not promote the Reign of God’s justice, peace, and love. One could rightly say that Jesus was not a “family man.” In his parables and wisdom household structures are often spaces of inequity, greed, jealousy, dishonesty, and domination.

**Luke 16:1-13**

Luke’s parable of the “Dishonest Household Manager” is a story that features the fraught hierarchies of the 1st century Roman imperial colonial context. Interpreters of the parable have long struggled to understand why Jesus (and Luke) would exemplify one who behaves at worst dishonestly and at best shrewdly. The context of Jesus’ critique of the system of households and their propensity for violence offers a way to appreciate the parable as a space in which Jesus illustrates the problems of the household as a structure and the capacity to align with God’s purposes for justice, peace, and love even in systems that promote violence.

The structure of the economic system that Jesus illustrates illumines the brutality of the economy of this household. Economic disparity is stark in that there is a rich property owner on the one hand (16:1) and those who manage (16:2), labor (16:3), beg (16:3) and are enslaved (16:13) on the other. The threat of downward mobility looms, as the property manager imagines his options. The anxiety of the system is palpable, and no one, not even the rich property owner, seems to have peace.

The property manager’s choices in this system are ones that work to make the best of a bad situation. Some interpreters argue that his calculations do not defraud his boss but remove his own profit from the ledger. Whatever the case, he attains some restitution for the property owner, and settles the bill for those with outstanding debts. By pursuing a middle way, he navigates a brutal system in ways that offer some relief for all. While this approach may not represent a fully realized Just Peace, it is a path to making some peace in a bad situation. It is comforting to know that Jesus offers us wisdom for navigating such a real-world challenge that most of us face in one way or another every day.

**Ephesians 2:14-22**

The writer of Ephesians, likely an interpreter of Paul writing in the latter part of the 1st century CE (perhaps a contemporary of Luke), offers a teaching in which division between Jewish and Gentile people has been reconciled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The metaphor of the household is held up at the conclusion of the text. Here the writer illumines that God’s purpose in Jesus Christ is to eliminate hostility between people (in this case Jews and Gentiles) and to unify them in a “dwelling place” (household) for God.

Representing divisions and hostilities between Jewish and Gentile people in our 21st century context presents a problem for a preacher dedicated to Just Peace. Too often this text, and others like, it have been used to promote an idea of the Christian supercession of Judaism. The violence of this interpretive approach is connected to anti-Judaism, and integrally related to the evil legacies of the Holocaust. Israel’s scriptural tradition holds a vision of God’s intention to reconcile outcasts and foreigners with Israel (Isaiah 56), and this vision deeply informed the teaching of Jesus (a Jewish religious leader). In this sense, a theological vision of peace and justice that is faithful to the Bible is one that acknowledges the roots of the work of peace and justice in the heritage of Judaism, and God’s redemptive and reconciling work to be for all people and creation.