

Amos 8:4-7. Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, "when will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat." The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob. Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

Luke 16:1-13. Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him. 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg---I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly and make it four hundred.' Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. "He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property who will give you property of your own? No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

"Unmasking Economic Corruption"
"You cannot serve both God and Mammon"
Luke 16:13

"Mammon, as Jesus called it, isn't really a bad guy, but he has had bad press. The trouble is that mammon makes a good servant but a simply awful boss. The problem arises when we look to mammon for what only God can provide. Another way to look at this is to make sure we have it straight whether we are using mammon or mammon is using us. If we put mammon first, we are courting spiritual death. That doesn't make mammon a bad guy but it does make you a bad guy. It's like what Mark Twain said of the devil that although everybody speaks ill of him, to become a spiritual leader of three quarters of the world population shows uncommon administrative ability. When we are serving God and mammon is serving us, things are beginning to get in the right order." (source unknown)

Our gospel lesson today is a Jesus' parable known as 'The Dishonest Steward' which helps to open our eyes to the ways in which, mammon, has become our boss, corrupting our socio/economic/political system. It gets us in touch with feelings of personal vulnerability associated with unemployment. Think pink slips, forced retirement, corporate downsizing, and loss of job to a cheaper overseas labor force. It focuses on ways of gaining power by securing money through dishonest means. Think usury, hidden interest charges, cooking the books, under the table payments. It leaves us with mixed feelings about justice being done. Think of joy over a debt of yours being cut in half! Think of how cool it is when a person 'gets even' with someone who is putting them into an economic rock and hard place! Think about those uncomfortable feelings that arise with the knowledge that 'getting even' was done by dishonest and immoral means. In his commentary on this parable, Rev. Charles McCoullough writes: 'In an economic system in which peasants were exploited by absentee landlords who employed corrupt managers, there were no good alternatives within that system for those without power or status. The alternatives for these

people lay outside the system, that is, in exposing such corruption, and in preaching a totally different system, where such dishonesty would neither be practiced nor rewarded. Jesus exposes the corruption and challenges us to create a different system—one that looks more like the Empire of God . . . in which all have enough and where there is no cheating or amassing of excessive wealth at the expense of the poor (“The Art of Parables, p. 114, 118). ‘It’s reasonable to conclude’, wrote McCollough, ‘that this parable is about a corrupt economic system. Jesus unmasks it and reveals its inner workings in order to promote its opposite.’”

So for a moment, let’s do some unmasking of our own. Think \$608 for EpiPens, and consider this September 16, 2016 story by Eric Lipton and Rachael Abrams, ‘EpiPen Maker Lobbies to Shift High Costs to Others’. WASHINGTON—Against a growing outcry over the surging price of EpiPens, a chorus of prominent voices has emerged with a smart-sounding solution: Add the EpiPen, the lifesaving allergy treatment, to a federal list of preventive medical services, a move that would eliminate the out-of-pocket costs of the product for millions of families—and mute the protests. Dr. Leonard Fromer, an assistant clinical professor of family medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles, just promoted the idea in the prestigious *American Journal of Medicine*. A handful of groups are preparing a formal request to the government. And Tonya Winders who runs a patient advocacy nonprofit organization, reached out late last month to crucial lawmakers. “We can save lives by ensuring access to these medications,” said Ms. Winders, chief executive of the Allergy and Asthma Network. A point not mentioned by these advocates is that a big potential beneficiary of the campaign is Mylan, the pharmaceutical giant behind EpiPens. The company would be able to continue charging high prices for the product without patients complaining about the costs. An examination of the campaign by *The New York Times*, including a review of documents and interviews with more than a dozen people, shows that Mylan is well aware of that benefit and, in fact, has been helping

orchestrate and pay for the effort. The journal article says it was ‘drafted and revised’ by a medical writing consultation with Dr. Fromer. And Dr. Fromer himself has served in the last year as a paid Mylan consultant . . . The company has also contributed money to many other groups behind the effort, and it has met with them—and Ms. Winders’s organization in particular—to coordinate its strategy. The effort has accelerated in recent weeks, just as Mylan has faced a flood of criticism about its pricing of EpiPens. The retail price for the standard two-pack has jumped nearly fivefold since 2010, hitting \$608 this year. Multiple lawmakers and regulators have opened investigations into the pricing of the product, which has virtually no market competition. The idea being advanced is simple: If the EpiPen makes the federal preventive list, most Americans would have no insurance co-pay when getting the product. That means they could obtain the medication with no direct cost, regardless of its retail price. Mylan could keep the EpiPen at the current price, or perhaps raise it more, while keeping patient anger at a minimum. Instead, the federal government, health insurers and employers would pay the bill. Those costs, in turn, could be passed on to consumers in other ways, as in higher premiums or higher co-pays on other drugs. The company also pointed to steps it had taken to lower the price of the EpiPen. Mylan has announced more rebates for some patients and it is preparing to release a less expensive generic version. “In a way, it is brilliant,” said Rachel E. Sachs, a law professor who specializes in public health policy at Washington University in St. Louis. “We are all seeing them for what they are—the poster child for high drug prices right now, but they don’t want to be. And this tactic is nothing but a self-serving move, not a public-regarding one.”

So, what do you think? Do we let injustices continue in our dishonest economic system by muting our voices once our personal financial crisis is over and our needs get met? Is Mylan like the corrupt land-lord in Jesus’ parable that is never held accountable for excessive charging of its goods?