

HIGHLY VALUED - LEVERAGE WITH GOOD  
A SERMON BASED ON LUKE 16:1-15  
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO  
SUNDAY, MAY 12, 2019  
10:00 a.m.

Two weeks ago it was widely reported in the news  
that Facebook is suing a New Zealand Firm  
for selling what they called 'fake likes' on Instagram.

Forbes specifically reported that,

“Depending on how many likes you ordered,  
it would have cost you between  
10 and 99 dollars a week for the likes.

Apparently the New Zealand company  
has made more than \$9 million dollars doing this,  
selling likes.

Facebook has given notice that it will go after not only the company,  
but those who use the company's service.

They said they users will 'receive an in-app message

alerting them that we have removed the inauthentic likes,  
follows and comments given by their account to others.’<sup>1</sup>

But then oddly, in what seems to be a contradictory move,  
it was then reported that Facebook would be starting  
a pilot program for its Instagram app, testing it first in Canada.  
Instagram will remove the reporting of the number of likes  
on your posts altogether.

The person making the post can still see how many likes there are,  
but the number will no longer be public.

In its preview of the change,

Instagram says,

‘We want your followers to focus on what you share,  
not on how many likes your posts get.’<sup>2</sup>

Instagram says it wants people to concentrate on the posts,  
and interacting with the app,  
rather than just likes.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/emmawoollacott/2019/04/26/facebook-sues-new-zealand-firm-for-selling-fake-likes-on-instagram/#43804c9496f9>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicolemartin1/2019/04/30/instagram-may-be-getting-rid-of-likes-on-platform/#27815b3031d1>

There are studies that point that in the culture around social media, there is a vulnerability to an 'unhealthy obsession with 'likes' and comparison to others online.

The negative factors were described as heavy.

“Things like anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep quality, and negative impact on body image were all reported.”

The thought is that removing likes would remove the competitive aspect, increase authenticity and thus prove beneficial.

They are trying to change the Instagram economy.

They are looking to put the 'likes' sellers out of business.

That is a very small demonstration of the economy of social media.

Likes are highly valued.

Highly valued enough that people are willing to pay for them.

Highly valued enough that someone made over 9 million dollars selling them, and Facebook is suing them.

Highly valued enough that people are becoming anxious, depressed

and losing sleep over not having them,  
or not having enough of them,  
or not having more than others of them.

Such is the value of likes in a social media economy.

Now, for this room,

in which many of you still don't have computers,  
or haven't turned them on in over a week,

who have phones that you only use

in case you need to call CAA or 911,

and whose children and grandchildren are nagging at you

to leave it turned on so they can text you,

but you don't - because who needs that,

for this room,

for whom many have a Facebook account,

but haven't checked it in a year,

and for whom Instagram is a bit of mystery,

who think a follower is that stray cat that comes on your walk,

the economy of likes seems baffling.

Highly valuing likes, seems almost absurd.

Because it is.

When you stand outside of that economy,  
thinking of people spending millions on 'likes',  
or becoming anxious and depressed and losing sleep over 'likes',  
you can completely understand  
and even affirm Jesus' words you heard today,  
"What is highly valued among people,  
is detestable in God's sight."

We have called this next teaching series 'Highly Valued'.

We intended the title to be expositional, as in exposing.

We want to expose what we have come to highly value,  
the economies we have bought into,  
but which have no value, and which may in fact  
be detestable in God's sight.

It is why we are using the image  
of a person taking a selfie.

The selfie is a highly valued currency  
in the social media economy.

But I am always struck that in taking a selfie,  
the individual doesn't actually get to see  
where they are.  
They've put their back to it.  
So, until either they put down the camera  
and turn around,  
or, until they scroll through their pictures later,  
they themselves aren't seeing  
the amazing thing  
they want to make sure you see.

Don't overwork my statement.

Selfies are fun.

And I want to see the fun places you went.

But this series is about making correct valuations.

Most of us know,

and can see clearly,

that likes on a post you put up on a social media account

are not a determination of your value.

It is not a determination of significance,  
of importance or of worth.

If, that is, you have not bought into that economy.

But some of you did.

Some of you have hundreds, if not thousands of people following you.

Some of you have taken down the post that didn't get enough likes.

Some of you are curating your image,

and the worst sin someone could commit against you,

is to post an image that doesn't fit your narrative,

or is less than flattering.

You have placed high value there.

But before you judge Instagram users,

realize, that there are other economies with other currencies.

I see it even at seniors residences.

It is not the Instagram economy.

I was trying to come up with an Instagram joke, couldn't.

I'll have to leave that for another day.

But at the seniors residence, they are counting too, just not likes.

They are counting who has the most visitors.

They are counting who gets more time from staff.

They are counting who got asked to plan the next event.

They are counting who got to go out for lunch.

People not in that economy can tell you that those counts  
are not a determination of value,  
of significance, of importance or of worth.  
Unless you've bought into it.

There are other economies.

There are workplace economies where the value can be ability to sell.

Sport economies where the value can be ability to score.

School economies where the value can be ability to get the A.

You can probably name a few of your own or one that you are in.

The story we heard Jesus' tell today is an economic story of sorts.

I love it because whenever Jesus uses economic examples  
to make his point.

We get a little freaked.

I love it when Jesus freaks us out,



because then we tend to pay better attention.

Jesus says love your neighbour, we sit in the pew a little sleepy

and think,

yeah sure, sounds good.

Jesus says the person who worked one hour

is going to get the same pay as the person who worked twelve,

we sit bolt upright and

we are texting our union rep before church lets out.

Jesus does it again with this story.

He gets us a little confused and turned around,

which isn't a bad thing, because we pay better attention.

In this story Jesus tells,

a rich man finds out the person he hired

to manage his business, his assets, his property,

has been accused of wasting the rich man's possessions.

The manager is either bad at his job or taking advantage.

The rich man called the manager into his office

and asked for an accounting,

for a financial review,  
for receipts for the expenses.

The rich man said,

“Give an account, you can’t be my manager any longer.”

The manager was about to lose his job.

Knowing that he couldn’t do physical labour,

knowing he didn’t want the embarrassment of sitting at the city gate  
or the temple steps begging,

he came up with a plan.

He brought in the rich man’s clients to meet with him.

“How much do you owe my master?” he asked one.

“800 gallons of olive oil.”

The manager said to the client,

“Make it 400 gallons.”

The manager did the same with another client,

cutting his bill by twenty percent.

He did this, hoping these clients would remember

that they owed him a favour when he would be out looking for a job.

We all know this story.

We know it very well in fact.

Pay me in cash, I'll take off the HST.

Put my proposal on the top of the pile,

or even better, sneak me the numbers from the other bids,

so I can make mine the winning bid.

Do that I'll see about getting you and your husband

on that trip to Mexico.

We all know this story Jesus told.

It's why we have laws in place regarding conflict of interest,

against collusion, against bribery and against kickbacks.

It's why we seal bids

and give the Canada Revenue Agency sweeping powers.

It's why in Canada we made a law that politicians

can't become lobbyists for 5 years after they leave office.

We know this story. Very well.

Which is why we are startled when, in Jesus' story,  
the rich man, finding his manager has done just this sort of thing,  
commends him.

The rich man commended the dishonest manager because  
he had acted shrewdly.

Jesus then said

“For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing  
with their own kind,  
than are the people of the light.”

Now, before you jump to the conclusion

that with this story, Jesus is encouraging or praising dishonesty,  
or telling us to do whatever we need to do to land on our feet,  
remember two things.

First, it is a story, not a manual.

It is a story designed to lift up and highlight a truth.

It is not a ‘Go and do likewise, Good Samaritan story.’

It is a ‘The dishonest know how to operate in their economy.’

They are shrewd with what they've got.

They are smart, sharp-witted, clever, alert, discriminating.

And the children of light? not so much.'

That is the story.

It is not a mandate to go out and look for kickbacks.

It is bit of a spiritual slap up the side of the head,

to put a bit of sense into children of light,

and to knock them out of the other economies

they have bought into.

It is an 'even this manager knows to think about where he is

and what he's doing and what's next' kind of story.

It is a shouldn't a child of light be as shrewd,

smart, sharp-witted, clever, alert, discriminating,

when operating in God's faith economy?

So, what Jesus is saying is,

in the way you know counting likes aren't of high value

when you aren't in that economy

and in the way you know family visits aren't of high value

when you aren't in that economy,  
you, child of light,  
follower of Jesus,  
neither are you in the money economy.

Jesus says, be shrewd, use the money for the faith economy,  
use it to be the goodness of God,  
the grace of God, the kindness of God,  
use it to make friends for God.  
You can't serve two masters.  
And you are children of light.  
You can't serve both God and money.

The Pharisees were the sort of the clergy of the day,  
the upstanding, the righteous,  
the ones who could make others feel  
that somehow they loved God less.  
They sneered at Jesus.  
Sneered.  
Clearly he didn't get how the economy works.

To them Jesus said,  
God knows your hearts.  
What is highly valued among people,  
it's detestable in God's sight.

You are children of light.

You have income.

You have assets.

You have time.

You have skills.

You have you, and your character and Christ-likeness.

Remember you are in a different economy.

Be shrewed child of light.

Leverage what the master has given you for eternal things.

Make God and the economy of God your highest value.

Amen.

