

# Divine Exit Strategies

September 25, 2022

## Exit Strategies

When I read today's Gospel, the concept that comes to mind is exit strategies – you know, the ways that people find to get out, usually of bad situations. Do you remember the story of Steven Slater from about 10 or 12 years ago? He was the JetBlue flight attendant who got on the P.A. system, announced that he was sick of passengers abusing him, grabbed two beers from the beverage cart, deployed the emergency landing slide, and left the plane in what some would call a blaze of glory. When we're between a rock and a hard place, some, like Steven Slater, throw all caution to the wind. Some are passive or are paralyzed by fear. Some disregard their ethics and behave out of self-centeredness and greed, taking on the age-old axiom that the end justifies the means. Some creatively contribute to the building up of the reign of God.

## Eschatological Economics

After passages in the Gospels about lost sheep and lost coins and a son who had lost his way and, even more importantly, stories about how precious all lost souls are to God, the Gospel of Luke's storyline now returns to Eschatological Economics – that is, God's ultimate intent for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. On first hearing, Luke 16 sounds like one of those golden parachute stories in which executives take insane amounts of wealth while leaving everyone else to fail. Very often, in golden parachute situations, executives know that an accounting is coming, that they will soon be unemployed, and that they are “not strong enough to dig and are ashamed to beg” as our Gospel puts it. So, like the steward, they act shrewdly, making use of dishonest wealth for future security.

A closer reading, however, shows us the steward is not at all like the execs who take golden parachutes. Notice that the steward does not set aside money he has siphoned off from his master's business in an offshore account. In fact, he takes no money for himself at all. Instead, he writes off the debts of others so that when he is dismissed as manager, people MAY welcome him into their homes. This parable is not just about losing jobs and exit strategies, it's about our relationships to the distribution and consumption of goods and services, especially when we are in tight places.

When we are in hard times, the temptation is to turn inward and take care of ourselves first, to be Steven Slater, grabbing the beer and shouting “take this job.” But the manager in this story, facing his own demise, liberates OTHERS in hope of reciprocity. He does this IN HOPE of creating a new paradigm in which people take care of one another. Even more than expecting that his master's debtors will take HIM in, the manager is unleashing the power and hope of hospitality and community. He is creating a precedent for people catching one another when they fall. As I read this parable this year, THAT is the divine nugget here – that the manager, instead of shaking down the debtors for every last cent he can get out of them before he is fired, gives back, behaves generously, seeks relationship, invests in others.

Don Friesen says that there are two kinds of parables: one is the “Go Thou and Do Likewise” type of parable, and the second is the “How Much More” type. The parable we have this morning is not a “Go Thou and Do Likewise” parable. This is a “How Much More” parable,

meaning that if a dishonest manager can ensure his future with shrewdness, “how much more” should we be able to do as honest people? How much more astute and shrewd in advancing the cause of God should we be?

If in the business world cleverness, ingenuity, aggressiveness, and risk-taking are the tools for success, how much more creative, aggressive, and willing to take risks to ensure the future of God’s creation should those committed to the Realm of God be? Building up the Realm of God isn’t only seeing how many zeros you can add to a charity check, it is creating a way of living that utilizes your resources to create a world rooted in God’s priorities, a world God wants you, and all of God’s beloveds, to live in. It’s using your very being to be a collaborator in building the reign of God.

Here’s the thing friends, there are hundreds of people in this city who are homeless today. One in five female students on university campuses will be sexually assaulted. Tuberculosis deaths are on the rise across the world. Following Jesus is committing as much of our time, energy, and resources to eradicating those horrors as we commit to our own exit strategies. If Steven Slater, the JetBlue flight attendant, had been committed to following Jesus’ ways, eradicating Tuberculosis or creating a world in which going to college isn’t a sexually dangerous undertaking for a woman, his exit would have been much, much different.

The bottom line is that money is a good servant, but a poor master. For so many of us, when we get into a tight spot, we often treat money as our master, letting it rule how we live, act, and see the world. The challenge that our Gospel passage gives us is to understand our personal resources, our wealth, our personal economies, as a servant, as a means of building the kingdom. To put it another way, St. Paul tells us that where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also.

And so, as we step into this season of exploring WHY our church exists and HOW we love our neighbors without exception, my prayer is that we may be found to treasure God’s ways of finding the lost and caring for the poor, rather than the worldly way of feathering our own nests.

### **Pride and Stewardship—Pride**

Before we lift up the prayers of the people and ask God to inspire our generosity, I’d like to offer a word of thanks to everyone who came out, volunteered, and in any other way supported our booth at Pride Alive yesterday, especially Kathleen Caylor and Larry Krueger who coordinated our booth with me. It was a beautiful gathering of the full spectrum of God’s beloveds!

For the last 6 to 8 years, our church has offered Glitter Blessings at Pride, and I’m always fascinated, enchanted, awed, and (truth be told) sorrowful as I observe these blessings unfold. They’re fascinating and enchanting because, very often, people start to glow even before we say the words and sprinkle the glitter on their foreheads or hands. It’s like the mere offer to remind them of God’s grace and that they are beloved is enough to kindle a light from within.

Other times, folks are hesitant, a little suspicious of us, but lean forward and ask to be blessed nonetheless. I like to imagine these folks are shy, maybe cautious simply because we’re new to them, or maybe blessing isn’t language they’ve experienced a lot of, and in a group like the

LGBTQIA community that has been hurt in oh so many ways, caution is a completely reasonable behavior.

One of the lines that I often share after we've offered the blessings is that God's love is like glitter – it's eternal! There's no getting rid of it! Yet other times when we offer the blessings, there's hesitance, sometimes even fear.

Now, most of you know me well enough to know that I understand that church and faith aren't things that everyone is into, and that I respect that. What breaks my heart as we offer Glitter Blessings is to know that, for some, the church and people of faith have behaved so badly toward them that the idea of a blessing, with or without glitter, doesn't just leave them cold, it raises something fearful and distrusting, sometimes even hard within them. Nonetheless, I trust that you join me today in praying blessing on all of these lives – the eager, the hesitant, the mistrusting, the fearful, even the angry. I trust that you join me in praying blessing on these lives because I know that you wouldn't be part of Union if you don't, in some way, seek to embrace our stewardship theme which Cheryl helped us to kick off so beautifully this morning, "Loving Our Neighbors, No Exceptions." You wouldn't be here if you didn't understand at some level that the blessing of the world is a primal instinct within love of neighbor.

### **Loving Our Neighbors**

Over the course of the next six weeks, we're going to be focusing on love of neighbor, without exception, as our stewardship theme, exploring how we put flesh on that idea, and how our financial support of this church helps to make God's love a reality. One of the things that we did at our all-church retreat at Moon Beach Camp a couple of weeks ago is we created a map of what Union does, how we do it, and why. The idea is that in order for us to find value and meaning in something – in this instance, this church - it's helpful to understand why it matters to us and to the wider world.

One helpful way to do that is to think about what we do and how we do it, because these two ideas will help us to be able to explore our WHY. I'm going to process this with you a little more deeply in the weeks to come, but for today, I'd just like you to think about WHAT Union does. From Glitter Blessings at Pride, to worship, to youth groups, what are some of the things that Union does that are meaningful and impactful? I've put four Post-it notes in each of your bulletins. I invite you, over the course of the rest of worship, to think of four things that Union does that are meaningful, write them each on a separate Post-it, and after worship, stick each of your sticky notes on the wall next to the baptismal font. Don't worry about arranging them; we'll do that later. So, again, think of four things that Union does that are meaningful, write them each on a separate Post-it, and stick them on the wall after worship.

Rev. Bridget Flad Daniels  
Union Congregational United Church of Christ  
Green Bay, Wisconsin  
**1 Timothy 6:6-19, Luke 16:1-13**  
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