

Glen Ridge Congregational Church  
The Rev. John Sampson

### **“Bad Business”**



Luke 16:1 – 13  
September 21, 2025

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Did Jesus really just say that?

Did the master really just praise the servant who squandered the master's wealth?

Did the Christ really just tell us to make friends with those who get their wealth dishonestly?

Yep. He did.

I often say that one of the things I love about Jesus is the way he flips all of our expectations, and assumptions, and rules. Because it's in these moments of unexpected instability that he hopes that we might just get a little glimpse of God's kin-dom breaking through. We might just get a glimpse of the vastness of God's love for all of us.

Jesus tells us these provocative stories so that we might see again God's love for not only those of us who are educated, rich, law-abiding citizens, but even for those of us who are criminals, and poor, and who never made it past the ninth grade.

I think many of you know that our Church is offering a weekly reading of *Tattoos on the Heart* by Greg Boyle. It's a book that also tells us unexpected stories in the hopes that they will challenge each of us to reexamine our own prejudices, and pull the scales off the eyes of our hearts to see those who we may only understand as criminals, and gang-bangers, and prostitutes as the children of God that they are.

Boyle grew up as a white man in middle class Los Angeles, and entered the priesthood in his twenties. His first assignment was a placement in Bolivia, in South America, ministering to poor, who were descended from the indigenous people of the area. And we might think we know how the story goes: a white, educated man from the United States comes in to save the poor natives. But it's actually the opposite that happens. In his ministry to the poor, Boyle is transformed. It is through them that Boyle learns about the Gospel in a way that no seminary, or church could.

He comes back to the US and is placed at Mission Dolores, the Mission of Tears, which is one of the poorest in the diocese, sandwiched between two huge housing projects. He is sent to Ground Zero of gang activity in the entire nation. And what he experiences there in his ministry leads him to create Homeboy Industries as a way to help those who want to leave the gangs and the violence and the drugs, and the crushed human spirit that all of these things lead to, behind. For Boyle, Mission Dolores is Ground Zero for God's work of redemptive love not as a theory, not as something you read about in the Bible, but as a reality that changes lives in such practical and tangible ways.

Yes, there is a world in which people steal from those who they work for. Yes, there is a place where shady deals are done to provide a safety net for the self, at the expense of others. Yes, there is a world where the ability to simply survive is to be celebrated. Yes, there is a world in which being part of a gang provides a community, and a sense of protection, and where the only thing you have, your body, can be sold to help you survive.

And in this world, trying to be a child of light and healing might seem impotent and impractical and the work of dreamers.

But it is also a world in which we must choose.

Who will we be?

I don't know if you read the opening meditation in our bulletin this morning, but it is a quotation from Boyle. And it shares with us what he chose:

“Not much in my life makes any sense outside of God. Certainly, a place like Homeboy Industries is all folly and bad business unless the core of the endeavor seeks to imitate the kind of God one ought to believe in. In the end, I am helpless to explain why anyone would accompany those on the margins were it not for some anchored belief that the Ground of all Being thought it was a good idea.”

In the economics of our world where dishonest wealth, and dishonest hearts seem to provide a safety net, seem to be the very ocean we collectively swim in, to move to the margins and devote one's life to helping gang members, and prostitutes, those whose first language is not English, and who may be poor, may seem like folly. To strive to be a child of light, in this world, may even be technically illegal. But that's only if you allow yourself to take the world's perspective as your perspective.

If you choose to take the perspective of the scriptures we call holy, then standing before you you will only see the beloved children of God. Children who certainly do some pretty bad things. Children who are responsible for their actions. And children we are called to love even as ourselves.

This is a hard love, for so many reasons. But we don't get to say no to it simply because it is hard.

So, you ask me why I share with you this story of Greg Boyle and of Homeboy Industries today. And I say, because we need to hear it so badly.

With Russia violating the air-space of NATO countries, with the assassination of Charlie Kirk, with famine being declared in Gaza, with our own fights with cancer, and our financial problems, and the deaths of our loved ones, we need to know that God has not abandoned us. That love is still possible. That there are places where true good is thriving.

And there it is. Perhaps in an unexpected place, out on the margins. Perhaps among a people who seem so different than we are. Perhaps not some time long ago, but even this day. Perhaps that is the place where we can see God's love for all of us.

In this kind of world, where do you choose to stand?

Amen.