

## Occupy Good Pasture



[1]

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by [Jin S. Kim](#) [2] 07-14-2014 | 3:28pm



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The interesting thing about human nature is that even among the oppressed, people will seek supremacy, a pecking order. We human beings have great capacity for tenderness and compassion, and we're also the meanest things in the world! And even when we are oppressed together, we will try to find some advantage or superiority over others.

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“As for you, my flock, saith the Lord, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture?”

In other words: Do you have to get what's yours and at the same time mess it up for others?

Between the late 1950s and the mid 70s, the U.S. poverty rate [dropped from 22 percent to 11 percent](#) [7], mostly due to the decrease in the destitute elderly, because of the increase in benefits to Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

Education is one of the primary drivers of socioeconomic upward mobility. We had a vast welfare program after World War II in higher education called the GI Bill. It allowed millions of former soldiers to basically get a free education, to become the first in their families to receive higher education, setting them on an upwardly mobile course. Many of us here are beneficiaries of that particular welfare program. But, interestingly, the GI Bill was severely restricted for non-white people. So it was basically government-funded welfare for white people, as so many government programs are.

Economists tell us that a primary driver of poverty in a nation is the extreme accumulation of wealth by a relative few. When [1 percent of Americans own more than 40 percent of assets](#), [8] you know we live in a new Gilded Age. We have a greater disparity in wealth now than since 1929, when the stock market crash led to the Great Depression.

In 1933, four years after the crash, the Glass-Steagall Act was passed to control speculation and to separate traditional banking from investment banking. The separation of banking practice meant that traditional banks handled home mortgages, car loans, business loans, and personal loans, while investment banks raised large amounts of capital in a central trading place like Wall Street to finance big business. But we also know that investment banking means taking on high levels of leveraged risk, manipulating the value of currency, and speculating on stocks and bonds that do nothing to actually help build an economy. Wall Street is just legalized gambling for millionaires.

In 1999, the Gramm-Leech-Bliley Act dismantled Glass-Steagall, and that allowed big banks to buy each other up. These “too-big-to-fail” banks on Wall Street could now take the mortgages, car loans, and business loans made from their main street branch and then repackage and resell these loans in piecemeal fashion endlessly around the globe. In 2007, when one of these “too-big-to-fail” banks actually *was* allowed to fail, we had a massive global economic crisis. After that, none of these behemoth institutions was allowed to fail, and so the government spent [\\$700 billion to bail out Wall Street](#) [9] – a crisis precipitated by a foolish Republican Congress and an equally foolish Democratic White House that signed it into law.

What is being contested today is the vision of commonwealth. There are some in this country who are beholden to the logic of empire, a way of thinking that says that the average person is merely a commodity, that says that no amount of unfairness is too much as long as these commodified bodies produce more bricks with less straw. There are some who think that they can keep calling our rigged system “equal opportunity,” and that the people will keep consuming empty rhetoric as truth. There are some who still use the ugly and false categories of race to divide and conquer.

Some of us have a different story to tell, a story told by a humble man from Nazareth. Jesus represented the logic/Logos of God’s kingdom, because he was God’s Word made flesh. Jesus talked of repairing the breach between opposing people groups, and the oneness of humanity because we are all made in God’s image. When empire tried to divide by race, Jesus sought to unite by faith. People of faith throughout this great land are coming together to stand up for a fair, just, sustainable commonwealth. We don’t believe the ancient imperial lie, the logic of scarcity that leads people to be reduced to dog eat dog. We believe in shared prosperity, in a true commonwealth where there is enough health and well being for all.

The church must repent of our silent complicity in such a system. I believe that God has a word for us today:

“Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture?”

*Is it not enough for you to be an average millionaire or a billionaire?*

“But you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet and drink what you have fouled with your feet? Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide. I will save

my flock, and they will be no longer ravaged. I will judge between sheep and sheep.”

I want to point out that this is good news not only to the poor. This is good news to the rich too. The Lord promises through the prophet Ezekiel, “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them [poor and rich alike]. I, the Lord, will be their God, and David shall be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.”

This is good news for those in Washington and Wall Street and Main Street. There will be one shepherd over *all*, the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, the light-skinned and the dark-skinned, the native peoples, the new immigrants and the settled immigrants. **All of us will be fed justice.** And for some it will go down smoothly, and for others, we will be choking on it. But all of us are going to be better off by feeding on God’s justice.

And that is what the church is for. We have to confidently occupy this space, and then let this space expand until people in Wall Street and Washington are ashamed by the shabbiness of what they have built. Praise God that God offers us true pasture, a just, equitable, and sustainable pasture. Amen.

*Jin S. Kim is senior pastor at Church of All Nations in Minneapolis.*

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[2] <http://sojo.net/biography/jin-s-kim>

[3] <http://sojo.net/blogs/2014/07/14/occupy-good-pasture#comment-covenant>

[4] <http://sojo.net/letter-to-web-editor?post=Occupy%20Good%20Pasture>

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