

## HEARING THE VOICE OF EARTH IN THE LUKAN PARABLE OF THE POUNDS<sup>1</sup>

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Context informs any reading of a biblical text. My reading of the Parable of the Pounds in the Gospel of Luke (19:11–27) is informed by seeing and hearing the desperate plight of so much of the Earth community.<sup>2</sup> Suffering and brokenness within the Earth community is widespread and diverse. In this article, I seek to bring two examples of this suffering and brokenness from within the current Australian context, namely the fracking of Earth and human trafficking, into dialogue with the Lukan Parable of the Pounds. What insights do we glean or questions do we raise from weaving together this context and the Lukan text? In line with the ecological hermeneutics developing out of the Earth Bible project,<sup>3</sup> my reading of the parable will also utilize hermeneutics of suspicion, identification and retrieval in order to bring to the surface the pain of Earth represented in the Lukan text, and to allow the voice of the other-than-human Earth community to be heard, albeit implicitly, in the words of the third slave.

The brokenness caused by fracking is the first of the examples upon which I draw. As in other parts of the world, gas companies in Australia are mining to access large reserves of coal-seam gas and shale gas. For all shale gas extraction and cases where coal-seam gas is difficult to extract, the mining technique incorporates the process of hydraulic fracturing or fracking to extract the gas. Fracking is the high-pressured injection of a mixture of water, chemicals and sand into a well in order to fracture the rock and obtain access to gas reserves that are otherwise difficult to tap.<sup>4</sup> One of the greatest concerns with regard to contemporary fracking is the long-term

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1 This article is an expanded version of a paper that I presented at the SBL Meeting, San Diego, November, 2014.

2 I am using the term “Earth community” to refer to the planet Earth with its more-than-human (i.e., human and other-than-human) constituents.

3 See Norman C. Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics,” in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 3–5.

4 Damian Barrett, “What is Fracking?” ABC Science, <http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2013/12/04/3861669.htm> (accessed February 13, 2015).

effect on the sustainability and wellbeing of Earth. The wide-ranging effects of the gas mining, and fracking in particular, on Earth, both below and above the ground, can be devastating but the welfare of the Earth community does not appear to be the major concern of those driving these fracking projects.

In April 2013, the ABC screened a *Four Corners* program entitled “Gas Leak!” which investigated Government approval processes for some of Australia’s largest coal-seam gas developments, as well as detailing some of the effects of these gas projects on the land where they are carried out and the communities located there. The program revealed the damage and dangers to the land and the water reserves resulting from inadequate and flawed process: “The documents detail an approval process that was rushed, made with insufficient information, and put commercial considerations above environmental ones.”<sup>5</sup> Earth’s resources have been open to exploitation by gas companies for economic gain, but at what environmental and social cost?<sup>6</sup>

The second example upon which I draw is that of human trafficking which is a lucrative enterprise having global effects. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), it is not possible to give a reliable estimate of the global number of trafficked persons because of the “hidden populations” of those trafficked.<sup>7</sup> The end results of human trafficking, a modern-day form of slavery, continue to be evident in Australia, a destination country for trafficked persons. The motivation of the human traffickers is monetary gain: “Different trafficking operations have one key element in common: the business around the exploitation of the victims. With a few exceptions ..., the vast majority of trafficking is aimed at obtaining economic benefit from the labour and services extorted from the victims.”<sup>8</sup>

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5 “Gas Leak!” ABC *Four Corners*, April 1, 2013, obtained from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayhPNCUoQ7I> (accessed February 12, 2015).

6 In Victoria, there is currently a moratorium on coal-seam gas exploration and fracking as the Victorian Government reviews the recommendations of a parliamentary inquiry into the matter. Fracking continues in areas of Queensland and New South Wales. A January 2015 news article reveals the environmental issues caused by recent fracking. See ‘AGL Suspends Operations at Gloucester Coal Seam Gas Project after Discovery of Potentially Toxic Chemicals’, ABC News, January 27, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-27/agl-suspends-operations-at-gloucester/6049922> (accessed February 13, 2015).

7 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2014*, 30, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/GLOTIP\\_2014\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/GLOTIP_2014_full_report.pdf) (accessed February 11, 2015).

8 UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking*, 46.

These two contemporary examples of fracking and human trafficking reflect a similar dynamic of a person/company with power exerting control over other humans and/or the Earth itself and exploiting their bodies, labour and produce for maximum profit. Both situations cause pain and brokenness in those exploited. The pain is not isolated to the exploited, however, with the suffering being experienced by wider communities. Images of parents searching for their trafficked children, for instance, give insight into the anguish of entire families and communities who grieve for the “lost.”<sup>9</sup> Another instance is the devastation to some farming communities caused by coal-seam gas mining, as highlighted in the ABC *Four Corners* program, “Gas Leak!”<sup>10</sup> The interconnectedness of the Earth community means that the suffering of one affects the wellbeing of many.

Moreover, in both examples, the brokenness caused by exploitation is not always immediately obvious. On the surface level, much of Australian society operates with little or no recognition of human trafficking. Many Australians are either unaware of or choose not to see “the hidden population” of trafficked persons within Australia. Similarly, on the surface level, landscapes can appear peaceful while the underground damage to water and land caused by mining activity becomes evident only at a later stage.<sup>11</sup> These examples of contemporary violence and exploitation raise issues and questions which can be brought into dialogue with a reading of the Lukan Parable of the Pounds.

The Parable of the Pounds (19:11–27) is placed in a key position within the Lukan Gospel. It occurs immediately after the story of Zacchaeus, a rich man who gives half of his possessions to the poor (19:1–10),<sup>12</sup> and in the previous chapter, Jesus challenges a rich ruler to distribute his wealth to the poor (18:18–25). Several times the Gospel of Luke presents warnings about

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9 See, for instance, the November 2, 2014 report in ABC News of the fate of more than two hundred schoolgirls who were kidnapped in Chibok, Nigeria, and then forced into marriages. (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-02/boko-haram-leader-claims-kidnapped-girls-have-been-married-off/5860332> [accessed February 20, 2015]).

10 “Gas Leak!,” ABC *Four Corners*, April 1, 2013.

11 Drawing on the violent reality underlying the Pax Romana, Leah Schade has coined the phrase “Pax Methana” to refer to the perception of a peaceful landscape which hides the violence inflicted on Earth by fracking. Leah Schade, “Is Rom 8:9–15 Truly a Green Text? An Ecofeminist Critique,” paper presented at SBL Annual Meeting, San Diego, November 25, 2014.

12 While a number of translations give the words of Zacchaeus in 19:8 in a future sense, the verbs *didōmi* and *apodidōmi* are in the present tense.

the accumulation of wealth (for example, 6:24; 12:13–21; 16:19–31). The reader is therefore attuned to be suspicious of any character who is intent on getting richer at any cost.<sup>13</sup> The parable is the last story before Jesus enters Jerusalem (19:28–40).

In the traditional reading of the Parable of the Pounds the third slave is criticised for his inaction and is contrasted negatively with the first two slaves who act according to their master's expectations.<sup>14</sup> Approaching the text with a hermeneutic of suspicion, it is evident that the traditional reading of the parable is anthropocentric. The focus in such a reading is on the one identified as "of noble birth" (*anthrōpos tis eugenēs*), his slaves (*douloi*) and the citizens (*politai*) who oppose the nobleman. Earth's other-than-human community is given little or no attention.

When we read in the Parable of the Pounds that a nobleman travels to a distant country or land (*chōra*) in order to receive or take hold of (*labein*) a *basileia* for himself and is successful in that aim (19:12, 15), the history of Herod the Great and Archelaus each travelling to Rome to gain approval to rule is evoked.<sup>15</sup> This, in turn, triggers our hermeneutic of suspicion. Like Herod the Great and Archelaus, the nobleman assumes that he can take possession of a *basileia*, all the Earth community contained within geographic boundaries of human determination. He displays no awareness of the intrinsic value of the Earth community, rather it is something to be ruled over and exploited.

The parable presents a contrast between the *basileia* of the nobleman (19:12, 15) and the "basileia of God," a key term at the beginning of this text (19:11), and throughout Luke's Gospel.<sup>16</sup> Our contemporary context also

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13 Such a reader would also be suspicious of contemporary individuals or mining companies whose wealth comes at the expense or wellbeing of others, human and other-than-human.

14 See, for example, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2 vols., Anchor Bible 28, 28a (New York: Doubleday, 1981, 1985), 2:1232–33; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978), 700–701; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 309; R. T. France, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 302–5; David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), 230–31. While David E. Garland's interpretation of the parable differs from a "traditional reading," he nevertheless still describes the third slave as careless and afraid. See David E. Garland, *Luke*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 754–64; also John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 380–82.

15 So Josephus, *Ant.* 14.370–89; 17.219–22, 299–303.

16 The term "basileia of God" occurs 32 times in the Gospel of Luke: 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1, 10; 9:2, 11, 27, 60, 62; 10:9, 11; 11:20; 13:18, 20, 28, 29; 14:15; 16:16; 17:20(x2), 21; 18:16, 17, 24, 25, 29; 19:11; 21:31; 22:16, 18; 23:51.

invites us to draw a contrast between the ethic of the *basileia* of God and the motivation of those who seek to build an empire or *basileia* for themselves through violent and exploitative means, such as fracking and trafficking. Anne Elvey describes the Lukan *basileia* of God as “divine gift,” displaying the “hospitality of God.”<sup>17</sup> From a snapshot of the uses of the term in Luke, we see that the *basileia* of God is good news (4:43; 8:1) and is welcomed graciously by those who do not exercise power over the Earth community (6:20; 18:17), as opposed to those who claim property and riches for themselves (18:24). While some aspects of these descriptions of the *basileia* of God are anthropocentric, there are also aspects which allow us to imagine a broader vision for the *basileia* of God, one that incorporates the entire Earth community.

During his Galilean ministry, for instance, Jesus is described as proclaiming the *basileia* of God in and through the cities and villages (for example, 4:43; 8:1). Here, the words *polis* and *kōmē* are usually understood as the human inhabitants of a city or village, but we can expand our vision to include other-than-human elements. The entire Earth community in that region hears Jesus’ proclamation. In the Gospel of Luke, as Elvey notes, the winds and the water (8:25) and a mulberry tree (17:6) are characterized as obeying commands. The verb *hupakouō* incorporates the verb *akouō*, to hear. Thus, these Earth elements hear and obey. In 19:40, we also learn that “the stones would shout out.”<sup>18</sup> Both voice and hearing are ascribed to other-than-human members of the Earth community in the Gospel of Luke. It is possible therefore, to envision Jesus’ proclamation of the good news of the *basileia* as inclusive of the entire Earth community.<sup>19</sup>

In the same way we can envision Earth which is the subject of fracking as hearing and having voice. With such an understanding, a range of images and questions come to mind: What does Earth hear in the fracking process? Is the voice of Earth heard amid the violence wrought on it? Perhaps Earth

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17 Anne Elvey, “Storing Up Death, Storing Up Life: An Earth Story in Luke 12.13-34,” in *The Earth Story in the New Testament*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Vicky Balabanski (Earth Bible 5 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 103. For a discussion of the theme “hospitality of God” in the Gospel of Luke, see Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke’s Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), esp. 4–5.

18 See Anne F. Elvey, *The Matter of the Text: Material Engagements between Luke and the Five Senses*, *The Bible in the Modern World* 37 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 128, 132–33.

19 This is also suggested by Michael Trainor: “God’s *basileia* is not exclusively anthropocentric but inclusive of all creation.” Michael Trainor, *About Earth’s Child: An Ecological Listening to the Gospel of Luke*, *The Earth Bible Commentary* 2, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 130.

cries out in the voice of toxic waste products?<sup>20</sup> Who hears this cry and what is the response?

In 6:20, part of the Lukan Beatitudes, the *ptōchoi*, the poor, destitute and powerless,<sup>21</sup> are told the *basileia* of God is theirs. It is the Lukan *ptōchoi*, therefore, whose relationships within the Earth community model the values which epitomize God's *basileia*. We learn about these values early in the Gospel of Luke (4:5–7) when Jesus refuses the offer of *tas basileias tēs oikoumenēs* made by the devil (*diabolos*).<sup>22</sup> Jesus rejects the opportunity to assume power over Earth. God's *basileia* is characterised by right relationship amongst the Earth community, and this is what is modelled by the Lukan *ptōchoi*.<sup>23</sup> In 4:18–19, the *ptōchoi* are linked with captives, the blind and the oppressed as being the targets of Jesus' mission. The oppressed are literally “the shattered or broken” (*tethrausmenous*). Jesus proclaims and embodies release, so that they can flourish. Again, while the *ptōchoi* and the oppressed are usually understood in relation to humanity they can be understood with respect to all the Earth community.<sup>24</sup> As we will see, the *ptōchoi* and the oppressed in the Parable of the Pounds are more-than-human.

Within the parable, the first voice of resistance to the nobleman's actions comes from his citizens (*hoi politai autoi*) who protest that they do not want

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20 While the direct injection of toxic BTEX chemicals by mining companies in the fracking process is now banned in some states in Australia, the fracking process can itself produce these dangerous chemicals. See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-27/agl-suspends-operations-at-gloucester/6049922> (accessed March 4, 2015).

21 See definitions in Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 339.

22 The word *oikoumenē* can refer generally to the whole Earth, but is also used to refer to the Roman Empire, such as in Luke 2:1 where Caesar Augustus decrees that all the *oikoumenē* should be registered. See Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker [BAGD], *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 699. Note that the BAGD, as with several other lexicons, gives the definition “inhabited earth,” where the inhabitants are understood as humanity. I have used the term Earth, so that it can be inclusive of all the Earth community.

23 My understanding here has been influenced by the work of Elaine Wainwright. In a study of the Matthean beatitudes (Matt 5:1–11), Wainwright reads the “poor in spirit” as those who are in right relationships in the Earth community: “the poor in spirit’ know who they are in the simplicity of their being, which is gift, and how they are in relation to all Earth's others.” Elaine Wainwright with Robert J. Myles and Carlos Olivares, *The Gospel According to Matthew: The Basileia of the Heavens is Near at Hand*, Phoenix Guides to the New Testament (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 66.

24 So also Trainor, *About Earth's Child*, 112–13.

the nobleman to rule over them (*basileusai eph' hēmas*, 19:14). The use of *epi* with the accusative here, following the verb *basileusai*, denotes the notion of “power over,”<sup>25</sup> rather than a relationship of interconnectedness. This reinforces the depiction of the nobleman viewing the *basileia*, not as a gift to be welcomed, but as a possession to be aggressively taken for himself. The use of the unqualified definite article (*hoi politai autoi*) allows us to understand that it is all the citizens who are protesting, not just some of them. This evokes the cries of protest from many Australians against the aggressive taking of land by gas companies for mining purposes.<sup>26</sup> Will their cries be heard? Will their protest cause the companies to reconsider their actions?

As some have previously noted, the nobleman’s instruction to his slaves to trade (*pragmateuomai*) with their *mna* (see discussion below) until he comes back (19:13) has overtones of exploitative practice.<sup>27</sup> We discover later that the first two slaves make outrageous profits of 1000% and 500% from their trading (19:16, 18). This would seem to bear out the notion that these slaves have engaged in exploitation so that some of the Earth community will be impoverished by their actions.

The money given to each slave (19:13, 16, 18, 20) is a *mna*, translated as a “pound” in the NRSV. While it is commonly agreed that a *mna* is the equivalent of a hundred denarii or drachmae, Mark Allan Powell identifies the *mna* as a silver coin, while Everett Ferguson states that the *mna* is a monetary amount rather than a coin.<sup>28</sup> While each slave receives a *mna* (19:16, 18, 20), the nobleman refers to his money in general as *argurion* in 19:15, 23. This term suggests that the money consists of silver, whether one coin or not. Silver is a precious metal and Earth element, and for the nobleman and his obedient slaves, more silver is to be obtained at all costs. Just as the nobleman is portrayed earlier as taking a *basileia* for himself (19:12, 15),

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25 See BAGD, 365.

26 The Lock the Gate campaign is one such response, based on peaceful protest. See [http://www.lockthegate.org.au/missions\\_principles\\_aims](http://www.lockthegate.org.au/missions_principles_aims) (accessed February 13, 2015).

27 See Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. James D. Ernest, 3 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 3.:51; Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 678–79; and Elizabeth Dowling, *Taking Away the Pound: Women, Theology and the Parable of the Pounds in the Gospel of Luke*, LNTS 324 (London: T&T Clark International, 2007), 85.

28 See Mark Allan Powell, “Coins Mentioned in the New Testament,” Hyperlink \$1.9, in *Introducing the New Testament* Esources (Baker Academic, 2009), <http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/introducing-the-new-testament/264690/esources/themes/15> (accessed November 8, 2014); and E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 93n49.

he now seeks to “own” this precious Earth element for himself, assuming Earth’s resources are his to exploit.

Another voice of protest to the nobleman’s behaviour comes from the third slave. This slave, like the previous two slaves (19:16, 18), addresses him as *kyrie*, which can be translated as owner, lord, master. The nobleman understands himself as the owner and master of this part of Earth and its peoples, especially slaves. While *kyrios* is often used in the Gospel of Luke to refer to God or Jesus,<sup>29</sup> the *kyrios* of this parable can be aligned to neither. The slaves call him “master,” the one who “owns” them. The slaves are considered possessions, having no intrinsic worth. Their produce and labour are exploited for the sole purpose of benefitting the nobleman.

As the fracking and trafficking examples show, pain and brokenness spill over into the wider community. Human structures of power and exploitation affect the entire Earth community. The artificial human construct of power enables the nobleman to exploit his slaves, and this attitude of “power over” extends to the exploitation of Earth’s elements so that the entire Earth community is affected. This widespread brokenness, however, is the hidden underside of the parable. Taking a stand against this exploitation, the third slave defies his master’s expectations by wrapping his money in a cloth (19:20). The cloth is an Earth product made from natural Earth fibres. The third slave uses the cloth to protect the silver that he has been given. He is in right relationship with the whole Earth, both using Earth’s produce and caring for Earth’s elements, while refusing to exploit any part of the Earth community for profit.

The master, on the other hand, describes the third slave as *ponēros* (19:22) which is often translated as “wicked,”<sup>30</sup> but can also be translated as “worthless,” “useless,” or “unprofitable.”<sup>31</sup> For the master, the worth of the third slave is dependent upon how much profit he will generate for his master. Like the *basileia* appropriated by the master, the third slave is considered an object, a possession whose worth is dependent on his profitability to the so-called “owner.”

The third slave accuses the nobleman of two things: “You take up (*aireis*) what you did not lay down (*ethēkas*), and reap (*therizōn*) what you did not

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29 See James Dawsey, *The Lukan Voice: Confusion and Irony in the Gospel of Luke* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 9–10 and Dowling, *Taking Away the Pound*, 87.

30 So, for instance, the NRSV translation.

31 See definitions in Miller, Friberg and Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 322; and H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1447.

sow (*espeira*)” (19:21). The nobleman repeats the accusations without refuting either of them (19:22). It would seem that he accepts them as accurate descriptions of his actions. The first accusation is that the nobleman takes up what he did not lay down. An injunction against such action appears in various forms in a range of ancient writings. Thus it can be viewed as part of the common wisdom of ancient times (at least in the expanse of the Greco-Roman world).<sup>32</sup> To breach this principle and exploit for one’s personal gain is to disregard the interconnectedness and intrinsic worth of Earth.

The second accusation of reaping what he has not sown indicates that the nobleman is exploiting Earth, disrupting the relationship between sower and land. To be fertile, the land needs to be nurtured and regular fallow periods utilized. The sower who cannot reap the crop, because it has been taken by another, either goes without or sows an additional crop to make up for what is lost. There is the risk that this crop will also be reaped by another. There is further risk that the land will be over-worked and lose its fertility. The inter-relationship of the sower and land is disrupted. The nobleman’s actions affect the sustainability of the land. Earth’s produce is taken by one who has not sown and worked the land himself. While Earth is portrayed in the parable as the generous provider of minerals and crops, Earth is also portrayed as a victim of the nobleman’s exploitation. Earth, therefore, is included in the *ptōchoi* that is exploited and suffers as a result of the nobleman’s actions.

While the other-than-human voice of Earth is not explicitly heard in this parable, the words of the third slave to his master expose the master’s actions in relation to the land and its produce. The other-than-human voice of Earth is implicitly heard in the slave’s accusations: “You take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow” (19:21). The pain and lament of the land is implicit in these statements of exploitation. While the third slave’s words allow us to hear implicitly the protest of the other-than-human, it is at the same time problematic that this voice is mediated by a human character in the story. While the land mourns, we do not directly hear the lament. Neither is the reader informed explicitly of the pain experienced. In Hosea 4:3, we learn that the land mourns and all of creation

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32 See C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 671–72; and Garland, *Luke*, 761. See also Luise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 250n31. Josephus, *Apion* 2.216, identifies taking what you do not deposit as an action allotted severe punishment.

languishes, though we do not hear directly from the land. In Luke 19:40, as previously mentioned, we are told that “the stones would shout out.” Thus, in the Lukan pericope directly following the Parable of the Pounds, stones are portrayed as having voice and agency.<sup>33</sup> Such explicit voice and agency is not accredited to the land in the Parable of the Pounds, however.

While the words of the third slave do draw the reader’s attention to the effect of the nobleman’s actions on the land and the pain and exploitation that it suffers, the voice of the land is only indirectly heard in the parable. In the contemporary context, trafficked persons often have little or no opportunity themselves to cry out against their enslavement. It is the voice of those who protest on their behalf which resounds to those who choose to hear. Similarly, the voice of fracked Earth is mainly heard through the farmers and environmentalists who identify and express Earth’s pain. One of the effects of the various forms of exploitation is the silencing of the exploited. Commentators who critique the parable’s third slave for inaction,<sup>34</sup> do not appreciate what he has actually done. He has deliberately chosen not to follow his master’s instruction in order to take an active stance of resistance against exploitation and unethical practice, just as many do today.

The call by the master for the third slave’s *mna* to be taken from him and given to the first slave triggers another cry of protest, this time from the bystanders—“Master, he has ten *mnas*” (19:25). Their protest highlights the inequity in the sharing of resources. For those who are aware of the interconnectedness of all creation, such inequity is dire, but for those, in contrast, intent on profit at any cost, the discrepancy is of no consequence. This latter attitude is reflected in the nobleman’s ensuing words: “I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away” (19:26). Similar words have appeared earlier in the gospel in 8:18, though in a different context and with Jesus as the speaker. Here in the Parable of the Pounds, the saying reinforces the reality that some are getting richer at the expense of the poor—both human and other-than-human.

The destructive nature of the nobleman’s relationships is confirmed in the last verse of the parable (19:27) when he calls for those who had opposed his attempt to take a *basileia* to be slaughtered. This group are the protesting

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33 See Elvey, *The Matter of the Text*, 136.

34 So, for example, Fitzmyer, *Gospel According to Luke*, 2:1232–33; and Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 700–701.

citizens of 19:14 who are resisting the assumption of power by one who has no regard for his interconnectedness with the whole Earth community. It is these same citizens whom the nobleman calls to be slaughtered in front of him. Reading this in dialogue with the contemporary context raises the issue of the fate of those today protesting the acquisition of land by mining-companies and the fracking of Earth. Will these protestors also be “slaughtered” by the actions of the companies and by government regulations?

As I have demonstrated, the third slave in the parable speaks the words of protest of the oppressed Earth community. Within the Gospel of Luke, words of protest and the exposure of oppressive acts of those who have power or authority are also spoken by John the Baptist (3:19–20) and Jesus (for example, 11:42–46; 20:45–47), who will both lose their lives for speaking out (9:9; 19:47–48; 20:19).<sup>35</sup> The third slave and the oppressed Earth community are thus aligned with John the Baptist and Jesus.<sup>36</sup> The words and actions of the third slave and the oppressed Earth model the right relationships at the core of the *basileia* of God. As the resurrection vindicates Jesus, so too are all who live in right relationship vindicated. The nobleman in the parable, however, models values which are the antithesis of the *basileia* of God, highlighting that the *basileia* of God is not present in its fullness. Jesus’ parable therefore addresses the expectation expressed in 19:11 that the *basileia* of God would appear immediately.

Having read the Parable of the Pounds in dialogue with contemporary examples of exploitation, fracking and human trafficking, it is clear that many of the elements of this parable are being lived out in our midst. As these two examples highlight, the dynamic of the Parable of the Pounds, with the poor (both human and other-than-human) having anything they have taken away from them is a present reality within our Earth community. Against the traditional reading, the nobleman of the parable who seeks a *basileia* for himself and who displays no awareness of the integrity and interconnectedness of all creation cannot be likened in any way to an image of God or Jesus. The nobleman exploits Earth, slaves and others for his own

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35 For a detailed discussion of John the Baptist and Jesus challenging oppression and suffering the consequences, and links between the third slave and Jesus, see Dowling, *Taking away the Pound*, 112–15.

36 For a comparison between the third slave and Jesus, see Merrill Kitchen, “Rereading the Parable of the Pounds: A Social and Narrative Analysis of Luke 19:11–28,” in *Prophecy and Passion: Essays in Honour of Athol Gill*, ed. David Neville (Adelaide: Australian Theological Forum, 2002), 234–35.

economic profit, and uses extreme violence against those who challenge his assertion of power. In the same way, human trafficking, dangerous fracking of Earth and all exploitative practices counter the ethic of the *basileia* of God. As the parable reminds us, the fullness of the *basileia* of God will not be experienced while such practices continue.