



Lectionary 25, Year C

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15th Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Luke 16:1-13

Luke 16:1-13

¹ Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ² So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager any longer.' ³ Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' ⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' ⁷ Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.' ⁸ And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly, for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. ⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

¹⁰ "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much, and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹ If, then, you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if

you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No slave can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

SERMON TEXT:

Grace and Peace to you, from God our Father, and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

What in the world are we to make of today's parable? Jesus is telling us to be like the dishonest manager, the man that is stealing from his master.

Not only that, but to do it in hopes that when we are tossed out on the street, one of the people we helped will give us a job and a place to live. What?

Jesus is teaching us that we should make friends for ourselves using “dishonest wealth!” Those are his words. Not what you'd expect him to say

So what is he really talking about here?

First of all, I don't think I need to tell you that Jesus is NOT telling us it is ok to be thieves and dishonorable people. He isn't making the case for us to be greedy, self-serving and dishonest in any effort.

So what, then, is Jesus teaching us?

I think asking this question in the first place is one of the challenges of following the lectionary. That is what the three-year cycle of readings is called that we use in the church. There are good things and bad things about it, but what the lectionary does is start the reading out of context and then cuts it off, sometimes before Jesus makes his main point!

This reading on the dishonest manager is actually a continuation of what Jesus is teaching about lost sheep and the lost coin from last week's readings. What is missing is that between last week's reading and this week's is the parable of the prodigal son, another story about the return of something beloved that was lost, but now is found.

So, Jesus is teaching us that we can turn around and return home to the family of God when we go astray. God isn't passive in our lives before we make that decision on our own, but actually attending to us all along and guiding us home. God is making sure that we are found ("saved") in the first place.

Well then, let's take a look at this whole idea of salvation, because I think that is what Jesus is referencing here.

In the Old Testament, in what we would call first and second temple Judaism, there was a system of law put in place by Moses, on God's authority, that is used to show people their need for forgiveness for the sins they commit and the ongoing effects of sin in their lives.

Namely, the result of sin is a separation from the knowledge of the presence of God in their lives and corruption of a world God pronounced good.

The system of religious and societal law said that if humans could only do what God intended from the start, then everything would be ok.

But we could never fulfill the law because on our own we could never do what is good and right and just. Inevitably, under our own power, our human inclination to sin wins out.

Therefore, we need to be saved from the power of sin and evil since we cannot free ourselves. Jesus teaches us that it is only the intervention of Grace, through the Holy Spirit, that can do that. Only our reliance on God can do that. There is no ladder of righteousness that we can climb to get out of the hole of suffering we get ourselves into, or we are thrust into by circumstances of chance, or the sin of the world.

So, our God came in the form of Jesus Christ to live a perfect life, and the world hated him for it. But thank that same lord that some people listened to the message and so they were charged with sharing it.

And the message is this: You can't save yourself, so God has saved you. Now go and tell others.

Here is the connection to the story for today: we can't use our own righteousness to be saved, we can only use the righteousness of our master.

We take that righteousness, which was freely given to us on the cross, and settle up our debts to sin, death, and the power of the devil. And, having used what is our master's to settled up, we are under holy obligation to spread that Good News of forgiveness of debts, even to those who have hurt us.

So to sum up, I think what Jesus is saying here is that we should learn the lesson of the dishonest manager and take what is our master's and use it for our benefit and the benefit of those we know and are in contact with.

Indeed, our master wants us to do that, so why serve any other master to begin with?

Our master is a master of love, and mercy, and grace. Our master is willing to find us, care for us, welcome us home, and do all that even though we aren't able to do anything deserving of it.

This is so out of our realm of human understanding that we get tricked by the world that says the easy fix is good enough.

So, you see? You can't serve two masters. You can't serve the master of this world that says do what is good for you, yet can't deliver, if you are trying to serve the master of all creation who says do what is good for all, and delivers the whole world and eternal life.

So, take the master's wealth of grace, pay your debts with it, and share the knowledge of that, in faith and truth, with everyone you meet that they might experience the truth of Grace.

Amen.

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