

Pastor Jon's Sermon from September 18, 2022.

Based on the Parable of the Dishonest Manager from Luke 16:1-13

The Early Church Father, Augustine once remarked about the Parable of the Dishonest Manager, "I can't believe this story came from the lips of our Lord."

Are any of you wondering the same thing?

Let's start with the basics. Luke is the only gospel of the four that includes this parable of the unjust steward or dishonest manager. Luke talks more about money or wealth than any other Gospel.

The poor, or those on the margins in parable, are tenant farmers who face crippling debts to the landowner and manager. It was an unjust system.

The audience of the parable of the dishonest manager is Jesus' disciples. That means this is a message for the church, for our own discipleship. Apparently, there is something for us children of light to learn from the shrewd ways of this dishonest manager.

The parable itself deals with real life issues... like dishonesty at work, getting fired, the wealth gap between rich and poor, corrupt business practices, unpaid debts, forgiveness, and securing your future.

The parable starts off by saying "A rich man had a manager." Manager can also be translated as "steward." The Greek root for steward is "Oikos", like the yogurt, meaning house or household. A steward is in charge of managing someone else's household. Aren't we all stewards of God's household? We are born with nothing and we take nothing with us.

This manager is accused of squandering the rich man's property. Squandering has the sense of being careless or irresponsible, which should remind us of the prodigal Son in Luke 15... a chapter earlier. The careless, irresponsible son, who wished his father was dead and squandered his inheritance was welcomed home by his dad with open arms and a thrown big party... a sign of wasteful grace by the Father.

The landowner wants an accounting of the manager's books and fires him on the spot.

We are like this manager in too many ways to count. Aren't we? Are any of us good all the time? We all have a mix of good and bad traits... don't we? Have you squandered your time, talents, opportunities, money, health, or relationships? But God is careless with God's grace for us.

After being fired, this manager was worried about his future. He said he couldn't work and was too ashamed to beg. So, he hatched a cunning plan that would help secure his future after his firing. He went to each of the master's debtors, without any authority, and asked them what they owed. Really... he had to ask them what they owed.

He went ahead and reduced the debts in one case by 50%, and none by 20%. As a result, he would look good. In that economy people would want to repay the favor.

Yes, this a story of debt forgiveness. The manager probably was cutting out his own take. Did he have a come to Jesus moment? Did he actually make a turn for the good after he was exposed? Did he repent from his corrupt business practices?

Keep in mind in the first century, the manager could charge up to 50% more to put in his pocket. If Jesus says, "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." Truly none of our wealth, whether it's through investments or business is without sin.

Everything from the clothes we wear, the gas we put in our cars, the products buy, could and does exploit people or the earth in the process. No business or company is perfect all the time. So all our wealth essentially is dishonest. It is how we use it that matters. I think Jesus is suggesting there is a Godly way to use our money and wealth. A way that honors his kingdom. A way that raises people up, like lifting people from debt in this case.

In his exit interview, the manager is commended for his shrewdness by the landowner in securing his future.

What is Jesus commending here? We as disciples of Jesus and the church need to take a page out of the book people in this age who are shrewd and clever in business. For example, we need to think more about our online presence, and sharing the Gospel to our digital members.

Just think what could happen if we were as clever in pursuing the justice and mercy of the kingdom of God as we were in looking out for ourselves! Isn't it true, that we all too often toil and scheme for our own interests. We are selfish by nature. Most of our thinking is dominated by earthly stuff... of fulfilling our wants. What if we put that energy into kingdom matters... into loving the neighbor as ourselves? Into growing the church.

This seems to be a how much more parable. If a scoundrel like the dishonest manager can do some good for the kingdom by forgiving debts of exploited farmers, how much more can God use us, who have the benefit of hearing this parable, and are called to be creative, clever, and shrewd in spreading the gospel.

Our true riches, our eternal home is already prepared for us. It is promised through our baptism and faith in Jesus Christ. Our future is secure. And through our faith, we receive the benefits of forgiveness. In Holy Communion, Jesus says, is for the forgiveness of sins.

May we as disciples of Jesus plot and scheme ways to use our gifts and talents to draw people into the Kingdom of God and seek Justice for the marginalized. May we repent of our old ways and tell our testimony of how Jesus has forgiven our debts.