**Pastor’s Message “Trusted to be Faithful”**

How do we make sense of today’s Gospel reading? Does Jesus really encourage dishonesty? THAT doesn’t sound very “Jesusy” now, does it? This is actually one of the most confusing texts of the New Testament, so I was NOT happy when I saw that it came up as our lectionary reading for today. But, thinking I shouldn’t shy away from a challenge, especially the challenge of making sense of one of Jesus’ lessons, I decided to dive in and do my best!

So, let’s do some digging into this parable of the “shrewd” or “dishonest manager” so we can find some understanding of what Jesus is saying to us today…

In the reading, a wealthy man had thought he had hired a trustworthy manager to look after his business interests, but discovered the manager had squandered his property. When he confronted the dishonest manager, he demanded to be shown an accounting of business transactions.

In desperation, knowing that his carelessness was discovered and he would be losing his job, the dishonest manager devised a plan to make friends quickly with the rich man’s debtors. He called them in and slashed their debts 20-50% in hopes that this generous act may buy him favor with them for when he will surely need their generosity in the near future.

One would think this would have enraged the wealthy man, but instead, he praised the dishonest manager for being shrewd with what he was given to oversee. What? He’s praising the manager for doing exactly what he was firing him for?!

This makes no sense, so let’s try looking at this parable through Jesus’ eyes… Who would Jesus have us believe the wealthy man represents in the story? Most likely God, because it is God who is the source of all things. I guess that makes each of us the “dishonest” or “shrewd manager”…

Now that we have our roles established, remember that God blesses us with many things and expects us to manage those things to the best of our ability. God also blesses us with certain talents. Some are talented in the arts, sciences, trades, or a combination of many talents. God expects us to manage our use of these talents as well and be faithful with what we are entrusted with.

If God expects us to use all of the blessings He has given us as blessings to His kingdom, (which by the way… I think he DOES…) then we should do just that! But what if we don’t? What if God sees us being wasteful with what He has blessed us with?

For example, what if we consider winning the lottery as “dishonest wealth” (because it was gained without having to work for it). In addition to that, let's suppose that a religious figure, one of the “children of light” Jesus refers to, has won the lottery…

Oh, how exciting! Before winning the lottery, they thought of all of the good they could do for others if they ever won the jackpot, but now, they are overwhelmed with this tidal wave of wealth and they go on a spending spree! They buy a mansion on the French Riviera and furnish it with “all things chic” and travel the globe, staying at the most expensive hotels, eating the finest of meals and buying an entirely new wardrobe.

And not before too long… they’re broke and haven’t used the wealth wisely for the benefit of others. These are the ones who “have not been faithful with dishonest wealth”, so why would God entrust to them true riches(?) which are the eternal riches of heaven.

Conversely, what if someone won the lottery whom one would consider to be one of the “children of this age” which Jesus referred to.  They never made a promise to God to serve others, but they stay in their hometown and spend their winnings locally. They hire a local builder to design and construct a beautiful home. They furnish that home with items from the local furniture and appliance stores. They buy shiny new vehicles from the local car dealer.

And suddenly… they’re broke too… but they had supported local businesses - neighbors who celebrated with them when they heard of their good fortune.

Now that both lottery winners are broke, who will have the easier time receiving generosity from their neighbors? The one who used the money to build relationships with their neighbors, right? (Certainly not the one stranded in the French Riviera!)

This is what Jesus means when he says in verses 8 & 9, “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.”

The “children of this age” are savvy and know how to take care of themselves and others for the benefit of all. They know how to treat others favorably which can benefit them down the road when they need help.

The “children of light” are those who say they are working to benefit God’s kingdom but are hypocrites and only help themselves so they are missing out on blessings both here and in the life to come.

When we are being wasteful with what God has blessed us with, we aren’t storing up treasures in heaven. We are being dishonest managers of those gifts. But when we recognize the talents and abilities God has blessed us with and use them wisely and bless others with them, we can bless both God and others.

Just think of all of the blessings people can share. Music makers can inspire millions of people with just a three minute song. Teachers can help others learn to think critically and find solutions that work well for all people. Generous people can offer a helping hand or can fund projects developed to offer aid to the poor or those who cannot do everything themselves.

We all have gifts to share and God trusts us to be faithful with them. May we be found by God to be generous in our ways. Thanks be to God. Amen.