

Pentecost 15, Year C, 21 September 2025

There are rascals , rogues, and scallywags aplenty in the scriptures, and today's gospel reading features one of them most prominently - a manager or steward of an estate who is so poor at what he does that eventually,when he is called to account by his master, he cooks the books.

You have to picture this now - this fellow - knowing that he has done a poor job and that he is going to get canned changes the bottom line on all the debts that are owed to his master. Some he drops by 20%, some by as much as 50% - his theory being that the debtors of his master will be so happy to get a discount that they will gladly welcome him into their homes and feed him and care for him after he is fired.

Pretty far out reasoning, with maybe just a grain of truth to it.

I imagine if the manager of the CIBC called me up and told me that she was going to reduce my debts by 50% with a stroke of her pen that I might welcome her into my home after she got fired - but still - I would be a little uneasy about it - wouldn't you?

Uneasy because the police likely wouldn't be far behind her - and with good reason...

Yet what happens in the parable when the master finally hears the story, calls the dishonest manager before him and to our disbelief the master commends his manager because he had acted shrewdly for once and showed some initiative and intelligence in doing what he had done.

Where does one begin with this story? What in the world is Jesus trying to tell us?

First of all - let us not imagine that Jesus is commending the dishonesty of the manager. It is quite clear that he is not commending the fact that he was a bad manager, one quite willing to cheat his master, but rather that he is commending the shrewdness - the forethought of the manager in looking after himself by doing good to those who in turn may be expected to do good to him.

Jesus often uses people who are scoundrels to illustrate what God is like and what we should be like: think of the judge who would only give a poor widow her due after she bothered him over and over again, or the person who would not budge from his bed to help welcome a stranger until his door was beaten on repeatedly or the example of the fellow

who found a treasure in someone's field and went out and bought it so that he could keep the treasure for himself.

Each of these examples tells us something important about how we should live our faith and something important about God. We are meant to understand, in a humorous and surprising way, that if the reluctant judge can still give justice to widow - or the grumpy person can still get up and share his bread in the middle of the night, then how much more will God help us when we appeal for God's mercy? And if a man will expend every effort - if he will even cheat - just to obtain a treasure which he has found in someone else's field, then how much more ought we expend every effort to enter the Kingdom of God?

The life issue in today's parable has nothing to do with the manager's honesty or dishonesty - rather the issue is: just how shrewd, clever, and committed are the children of light, us, when it comes to their faith?"

Do we really use what we have at hand, in whatever proportion we have it, to the best advantage? Are we as anxious to ensure our future with God as the dishonest manager was to ensure his future in this world? Are we willing to change the bottom line so that when the time of reckoning comes there will be a place that welcomes us? Indeed, the issue at the very root of the parable of dishonest manager is: are we, as Christians, as people who profess belief in the living God, really committed to God and God's way?

Are we, who sit together here today, really committed, really full of faith? Really committed to God and God's purpose for our lives and the life of the world? Well -how can a person tell if we are committed? What signs help to prove the case one way or another? There is an old adage—follow the money. If you really want to know what a person is like and what is important to them, examine where they spend their resources and what type of relationship they have with them.

It might come as a surprise to you that over 1/3 of Jesus' parables and sayings concern the relationship between faithfulness and money. Now many of us are not comfortable talking about money and many become upset when we talk about money in church—but Jesus really leaves us with little choice.

Jesus talks so much about money because ,when push comes to shove, loyalties are revealed by what people do with their money and how they feel about it. Recall the rich young ruler - who could not commit himself to following Jesus because it meant leaving his money behind. Recall the Levite who left everything and followed Jesus. Recall the sermon

on the mount - and the lilies of the field which do not spin or toil. Recall the camel and the eye of the needle and the Widow who gave everything she had to the Temple Treasury. All stories about loyalty and about what is important to people and who they serve - God or Mammon.

Jesus ends the parable of the dishonest manager with these words: "the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light." More shrewd because their loyalties are not divided. They have only one care and concern—money and what money brings. To drive his point home, Jesus goes on with what is perhaps one of his most famous sayings concerning faithfulness and money - he says: "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."

The children of this world are more shrewd than us at times - like the dishonest manager, the children of this world will do all that is required to look after themselves - they will use all their money and all their power to get more money and more power. Better yet - if they can - they will use other people's money and other people's power to get these things, to ensure their future, to change their own bottom lines. Yes - the children of this world show a savvy that the children of light often lack - and it seems to me that they seem to have this savvy not because they are any smarter than you or I, but because they are more committed - they are only serving one master - their efforts are not divided, not confused, not lost in the gap that always exists between two masters.

We in the church often do things badly - we do them poorly - because we attempt to serve two masters - to serve both God and mammon - God and wealth. I think this is one of the big reasons why so many people in the church hate hearing about the problems the church has in raising money, getting volunteers, and doing work that, on the face of it, only benefits others. They hate to hear it because it guilts them out - it reminds them of their own torn loyalties, of their attempt to have their cake and eat it too. All too often we think that we have earned or that we deserve what we have—forgetting that ultimately everything comes from God and will return to God. As the old saying goes, you can't take it with you.

So often we Christians - we who speak of life as God intended it, we who talk about the quality of life and the depth and breadth and power of love, and of how each person can live well, with truth and beauty and peace, allow our divided loyalties to undermine the work and mission of the church and so we do things poorly, or in a half hearted, mediocre sort of way.

Rather give generously, we are guarded, even stingy in how we use our wealth. We hold onto to protect ourselves and our families rather than serving our Lord with it. we horde it and protect it for ourselves and our families rather than being generous with it and serving our Lord and Saviour with it. I'm sure you have all heard that expression that a person ought to give until it hurts....well - it strikes me that if one is supposed to give until it hurts then many of us Christians have a very low pain threshold! Low, because we regard the wealth we have as our own rather as a trust from God - a trust given to us by which we might make friends for ourselves and for the Kingdom which we are supposed to be serving. Indeed it is still true, no matter how you interpret the message of God's grace, that we reap what we sow; and if we sow sparingly, then the harvest is a sparse one.

Today's Gospel about the dishonest manager, challenges us to consider where our loyalties lie. Where do you put your efforts? What do you do with your time, energy, and money? Who or what are we really serving?

Let me end by saying that a manger who is finally approved by the master is the one who is unafraid to invest time, energy, emotion, and money so that the work that he or she is entrusted with succeeds and is unafraid to change the bottom line in the way that God intends for us to change it.