

15th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 20, Year C
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger
on September 21, 2025

Amos 8:4-7 / Psalm 113 / 1 Timothy 2:1-7 / Luke 16:1-13

*Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of Your Name;
Deliver us and forgive our sins, for Your Name's sake. Amen.*

So...today's Gospel seems very out of character for Jesus. He uses the Parable of the Dishonest Manager in a way that seems to be moral teaching. But it's not; it's a parable. And in Jesus's parable, there's usually a God figure and a human or an Israel figure. And in this parable, the God figure has entrusted the Israel figure with His riches. It was to indicate that Israel wasn't doing a very good job with God's riches and were insisting on adhering to Mosaic Law instead of sorting out their problems. Jesus was trying to illustrate that when Israel is faced with all sorts of crises, and instead of flailing, they should find creative ways to survive rather than stick so closely to the Law that they are blind to the crises.

Maybe Jesus uses the dishonest character in this parable to make it more relatable to those who know how to work within dishonest systems. Maybe it was a "know your audience" kind of situation. My Physics professor would use examples from not only physics, but from chemistry, math, computer science and other disciplines because he knew that only a small percentage of the class were Physics majors. He had to use examples that landed with students of other disciplines as well. Maybe that's what Jesus was doing: *I know there are quite a few dishonest dealers among us, so I'm gonna show that I'm relatable.*

The clarity in his parable comes in the transition from the parable to the teaching on wealth:

*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. If then
you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will*

entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?

Basically, if you're going to move out of managing money for the mafia and into traditional banking, you need to have managed the mafia's money well, or the bank isn't going to give you the job. An even better example is hackers! Some of the country's best computer hackers are hired by high tech companies, banks, and the US Military *precisely because* they know how hackers think.

We are entrusted with the true riches, which is everything around us. When we reflect on the stewardship of Creation – both that which God has created and that which we have created – we emphasize how this has been given to us by God to take care of, not to exploit. That final statement in today's Gospel really brings that home:

You cannot serve God and wealth.

That is really true with Creation Care: we can't extract and exploit for our own benefit while thinking that we are being stewards of Creation. But we forget sometimes that God is part of what we're all about. We forget that we have been made stewards, and we start to focus on bettering our own lives. As Amos warned:

[We] trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale?"

We fall into this self-focused trap, perhaps, because we find God distant and not active in our lives. Or do we keep God at a distance so our self-serving doesn't make us feel bad? If that's what we're doing, then we've reduced God to a disciplinarian. When we do that, the anti-religious win, because that's what they think the God that they don't believe in is.

But God is ever-present; God is among us. God sends the Spirit so we can be trustworthy with true riches.

From the Psalm: *Who is like the Lord our God, who sits enthroned on high but stoops to behold the heavens and the earth?*

From 1 Timothy: *There is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, Himself human.*

This is our reminder that God is ever-present, not as a disciplinarian. As our Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier and Friend. We're doing this together – *with* God! Our worship, our prayer, our social outreach, our vocations, our lives: we're doing this together *with* God, *for* God and through God's power. When we are self-serving and self-seeking, we push God out. We can't serve two masters; we can't serve God and ourselves. We're in this together.

In our Eucharistic Prayer, we hear:

*You called a people to Yourself, as a light to the nations,
You delivered them from bondage and led them to a land of promise.
Out of Your grace, You gave Jesus to be human, **to share our life**,
to proclaim the coming of Your holy reign
and to give Himself for us, a fragrant offering.*

That is our reminder that *God sits enthroned on high but stoops to behold the heavens and the earth*. God is with us. We focus on that at Christmas when we explore the meaning of *Emmanuel*, which means *God is with us*. But we need to be reminded of that throughout the year.

We have a Baptism today. [*Bibi Bisselle will be baptized at the 10am Service.*] So, let's have a look at our Baptismal Covenant to explore the difference between serving God and serving wealth or ourselves. Turn to page 303 in the Book of Common Prayer. In the Baptismal Covenant, we are asked if we will:

- *continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers*
- *persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord*
- *proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ*
- *seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself*
- *strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.*

[Keep the BCP open to that page because you will need it in a second.] The work that we are to do as followers of Christ is hard work. So, we say that we will do those things with the help of God – God who has stooped to earth.

It takes work to serve God, to be in this partnership with God. Money is so very alluring. And there is nothing more alluring in the American culture than the Greenback. And when we are self-serving in that way, we push God out, because we cannot serve 2 masters. But we are called to serve God first and to serve God's people ... with God's help, *God, who sits enthroned on high but stoops to behold the heavens and the earth.*

Bibi, whom we are welcoming into the Body of Christ today, is an infant. As you know, infant Baptism is controversial. There are denominations who are opposed to anything but believer Baptism. But the Orthodox Church not only baptizes infants, but as soon as they are baptized, they receive their first Communion.

Jesus is very pro-children. He says to His Disciples at the beginning of Matthew 18:

Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

I have a recent story of why we baptize infants and why Jesus wants us to come to Him as children do.

At the Wednesday 12.15 Service on September 3, we were gathering in an arc around the altar for Communion. Bibi – who is being baptized today – was crawling around the altar rail making cute baby noises and exploring that small corner of the church. But then, when the distribution of the bread and wine started, she stopped. And in her half-sitting-half-crawling position that pre-walkers are often in, she looked up, made no noise and just gazed upon the bread and the wine as it was distributed to each person. She was ankle-level, and we were standing, 6 of us. And it was from the start of the distribution of the bread all the way through the distribution of the wine. Bibi was silent and she just stared.

I am convinced that she saw the Holy Spirit hovering over all of us. Or maybe she recognized Jesus in the breaking of the Bread. Or she God stooped down over us. Because children know; children see. I don't want her to ever give up what she saw or felt. I don't want her to grow out of it. I want her to always see, feel and know God is ever-present, that God has stooped down to be with her.

In a world that values the service of wealth, I want BiBi to always see God.