

CONGREGATIONAL-CHRISTIAN CHURCH, UCC  
Sermon for Sunday, September 18, 2022

Luke 16:1-13  
"What a Parable"

This has got to be one of the most perplexing of all Jesus' parables. Really, there are no good characters here. It features a rogue manager who is so poor at his job that when called to account by the owner, he cooks the books! How about those who have debts? Where's their integrity? And besides questionable people, it discusses money – and we in church just hate issues regarding money.

Have you ever heard of reasoning like this? Many of you manage businesses – or own businesses – could your businesses sustain themselves with these big discounts? Right!

But maybe, just maybe, there's a bit of truth in the manager's reasoning – imagine if the local bank manager said he'd reduce your debt by 50% - wouldn't you care for him after he lost his job?

Yet what happens in this parable when the master finally hears the story and calls the manager into his office - it's amazing – I want a boss like that – the master commends his manager because he has acted shrewdly - because he revealed some intelligence in what he has done.

Does this make sense in 2022? The company is losing money, some of its debts are no longer collectable – and the manager commends the manager!

What do you think Jesus is trying to teach us here?

- First, Jesus is not condoning the dishonest manager, but Jesus is condoning his shrewdness, trying to do good for those who in return may do good for him

Frequently, Jesus uses scoundrels to illustrate what God is like and what we ought to be like

- Remember the judge who only gave the poor woman her due after she had bothered him over and over and over
- Or the individual who would not budge from his bed to help welcome the stranger until his door was repeatedly beaten

- Or the fellow who found a treasure in someone's field and went out and bought that field so the treasure would be his...

Each of these examples tells us something important about how we should live our faith and something important about God – but none of them tells us that God is unjust – or that God is annoyed when we call on God late at night – or that we should cheat another on a business deal –

Jesus wants us to understand in a humorous and interesting way, that if the reluctant judge can still give justice to the widow, if the grumpy sleeper can get up and share his bread in the middle of the night – then how much more God will help us when we appeal?

And if we humans use all our efforts, if we even cheat, just to obtain a treasure from another's field, then How much more should we work and give so we too can enter the realm of God.

The issue in today's parable has little to do with honesty or dishonesty. Rather the issue is – just how shrewd, clever and committed are the children of light when it comes to our faith?

Do we really look after ourselves? Do we really use what we have to the dishonest manager was to ensure his future in the world? Are we willing to do what it takes so God will welcome us into the heavenly realm?

At the root is this – as people who profess belief in the living God, are we really committed to God? Are we who sit together today, committed to our faith? – committed to God's purposes for the life of this church and the life of the world?

One of the ways to tell is to check how we feel about money. Over 1/3 of Jesus' parables and sayings are about relationships with money. He talks a lot about money because people's loyalties are revealed by what is done with money.

Jesus ends today's parable with these words: "The children of this age are shrewder in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light – and I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth, so that when it's gone, they may welcome you into their homes."

And to drive the point home – Jesus says what is his most famous saying regarding faithfulness and money – “no slave can serve 2 masters...you cannot serve God and wealth.”

Yes, sometimes the children of that world show a savvy we children of the light might lack – not because they are any smarter – but because they are more passionate and aren't serving 2 masters.

How often do we here in the church do things badly because we try to serve 2 masters? It might also have to do with why we hate hearing we don't have enough volunteers, can't raise enough funds, and do too much for others.

You here who serve God and this church have really stepped up to the plate since I've been serving here. Your work diligently and you are committed and I believe there are many opportunities available here. So yes, you're doing really well and the best is yet to come whatever that may look like – we can believe it because God is directing us. Amen