

Second Presbyterian Church
September 21, 2025 || Year C – Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 16:1-13

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke.

‘Then Jesus said to the disciples, ‘There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ Then the manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’

So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ Then he asked another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’

And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly, for the children of this age are more shrewd 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 is gone they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

“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? No slave can serve two masters, or 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.”

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us.

Thanks be to God.

The 13th-century poet Rumi begins a poem this way –

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”¹

This morning’s parable, which is unique to Luke’s Gospel, invites us to this field.

This field that transcends our dualistic thinking.

This field in which stories challenge our tendency to think in extremes – our tendency to ignore the complexities and nuances in which we work and live.

This field in which stories invite us to slowly question and ponder the world around us instead of rush toward judgment.

Out beyond our ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. Let us meet there.

Jesus summarizes this parable of the treacherous manager who acts wisely with a clear thesis – “You cannot serve God and wealth.” – a seemingly clear marker for what constitutes wrong or rightdoing.

And while this clear message offers a crisp ending to complex story, we miss so much if that is all we take from this sacred text.

“You cannot serve God and wealth,” Jesus says.

¹ <https://onbeing.org/blog/out-beyond-ideas/>

That's great, Jesus. I do appreciate that moral insight.

But what does that practically look like for us in this present time – in our own generation?

A generation that swims in the system of capitalism – a generation caught up in an economic machine that often orders our days and guides our futures.

One of my professors at Austin Seminary, the philosophical theologian Dr. Bill Greenway, often reminded us that we are all caught in various systems and that it is our responsibility to discern how we respond to and engage those systems as people who are also caught in the net of Christ.

Like the manager in our parable, we too must ask, “What will I do?”

As children of light, how will we deal with our generation?

As a Gospel that focuses on bringing good news to the poor, wealth is a prominent Lukan theme, and Luke's author insists on the appropriate use of wealth.

Luke is an earthy Gospel that teaches us how to embody the kingdom of God here and now – how to live as children of light among children of this age.

So, Jesus tells the disciples – tells us – a parable of a manager caught in a system.

A manager is accused of squandering a rich business owner's property and is quickly fired.

Fired and soon-to-be without a home, the manager needs to decide what to do next to survive.

Housing being the manager's primary goal, they seek what is needed by going to the rich business owner's debtors and decreasing their debts by 50 and 20 percent.

Surely this gracious offering will lead to these debtors welcoming the dismissed manager into their homes.

The business owner – who fired the manager – learns about this gracious debt reduction and praises the manager for acting wisely! A surprising response considering that the debt reduction ultimately harms the business owner's financial interests.

I imagine the business owner wryly smiling and saying to the manager, "Well played."

An odd tale with no clear ending. A nuanced tale that Jesus uses to make a larger point about the gift of acting shrewdly – wisely – prudently when engaging the economic systems that catch us.

And I love that Jesus uses imperfect people in an imperfect world to make this larger point. For we are imperfect people living in an imperfect world – we are complex beings caught in multiple realities.

The reality of wealth and the reality of Christ.

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”

A field in which the children of light – disciples caught in both Christ’s net and economic powers – learn how to act wisely, how to make friends for ourselves, for God’s kingdom, by means of dishonest wealth.

A field in which the body of Christ learns to befriend wealth in way that services heaven...in which the children of light shrewdly befriend capitalism to use dishonest, unjust, tainted wealth to bless the poor and extend debt-reducing grace.

A grace that remains when dishonest wealth fails us.

A grace that welcomes us and the friends we make into the eternal homes.

It is important to know that these eternal homes differ from the homes the manager was trying to access.

The manager desired to be welcomed into an *oikos* – a physical home. An important need for anyone’s survival.

The eternal home into which we desire to be welcomed into is a *skenē* – a tent or tabernacle – a word that reminds us of God’s movable presence.

While the *oikos* and the *skēnē* – our physical and spiritual homes – are both necessary for living, we cannot serve both.

Will we use God in service of wealth? Or will we shrewdly and wisely use wealth in service of God?

Where do we ultimately want to reside and be welcomed?

In homes where grace is offered only as means to an end?

Or in homes where grace offers true riches – the riches of living life with an eternal God whose steady presence travels with us wherever we go?

A life whose faithfulness with dishonest wealth leads to the true riches of grace – a grace that is not stagnant or settled in one physical place but is ever and always eternally on the move.

I realize that this sermon offers us more questions than answers as we search for the practical application of Jesus' words about whom we ultimately serve as children of light in this generation.

But that is exactly what Luke's parables do for us.

The author of Luke leaves it to us – the disciples – to figure out the details.

It is this open ending that makes parables so poignant and timely no matter the generation that hears, reads, and digests them.

We spiral around parables as they spiral within us – spurring us to slow down and pay attention to the questions that bubble up and cause our baptismal waters to ripple – questions that cause us to ponder who we are and how we act as the body of Christ.

Parables dance in the fields of complexity and call us to do the same as we listen for and wrestle with the questions that parables present.

Join me in this field and let your soul settle in the grass.

A field where ideas and language may not make much sense but in which the Holy Spirit's presence moves with us as we circle around questions that shape our life together as disciples of Christ who serve God above all else.