

God's Trust Fund

Scripture: Luke 16:1-13 Ord 25C

September 19, 2010

Scripture

16 1Then 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.

2So 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.'

3Then 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.

4I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.'

5So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

6He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.'

7Then 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.'

8And 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.

9And 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.

10"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.

11If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?

12And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?

13No 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."

Proclamation of the Word

Jesus never heard the adage about the three things one must never discuss:

Religion, Money, or Politics

He talks about money more than almost any other subject.

Here in Luke, 5 consecutive passages are written about money.

1 out of 7 passages in Luke concerns money.

But Jesus is talking to his disciples who have left everything to follow him so we think...

But some Pharisees are listening in, eavesdropping.

They ridicule Jesus for they were "lovers of money" according to verse 14.

Jesus is taking account of what he sees.

His is correcting the view that some believed the more righteous one is,
the more riches one would be blessed with by God.

Jesus tells us that faithful stewards or managers are people who take care of precious things that are not their own.

Jesus has a message for those who think they deserve what has been given or that we own what ultimately belongs to God. We even belong to God.

The Psalmist declares, "The earth is the Lord's and all that dwells in it."

Do you know faithful stewards? I know many.

Every morning in the front drive on the College Avenue side of our church, little people holding the hands of a mom, a dad, a caregiver are walked into the Preschool here at Fort Hill. Shelly Burchfield, the Director, and teachers like Mrs. Rutland and Mrs. McRoberts have diligently prepared to receive these children.

And the parents go to work or the grocery store fully entrusting their children to our care.

The little boo boos will be taken care of with soap, water and a band-aid.

A story will be lovingly read.

Eyes will keep watch while they play outside on our playground-

Small details, but important ones.

Being attentive in the small things is important.

Jesus tells us that faithful stewards or managers are people who take care of precious things that are not their own.

I few years ago I performed the wedding of one of my best friends, Julie Walkup.

She met a wonderful Englishman in Zimbabwe of all places.

She and Adrian were to be married right before they were being sent to India to serve as Presbyterian Mission Co-Workers for a year. Julie and I worked on Montreat Summer Staff together and amazingly ended up in Seminary together a few years later. We had been room mates in Montreat and half-way teased about living next door to each other someday. When I met Adrian her future husband, he told me he didn't really expect them to live in England or the US. I was a bit mad at him for influencing my dear friend to live across the globe maybe forever.

At the wedding reception, I spoke to Julie's mother.

Her husband Bob was having medical problems.

Their other son, Mark and wife Ruth were working with the US State Department in Islamabad, Pakistan.

I looked at Julie's mother with tears welling up knowing Julie and Adrian were leaving for India.

I said, "I know this must be a bittersweet day. Your children will be so far away from you and possibly in danger."

In her sweet quiet voice, she said that when they were baptized their children,

she and her husband entrusted them into God's care and dedicated them to God.
They knew that Julie and Mark did not belong to them, but to God.

It was their job and joy to care for them while they could.

Their children had important things to do now for God and for the world that God created and loves.

I remembered the days that my children were baptized and prayed for this woman's wisdom, strength and faith.

Jesus tells us that faithful stewards or managers are people who take care of precious things that are not their own

I know a Christian man who feels blessed by God. If he knows of a need in our community, a family in trouble, a way to make a difference, he will.

He is probably a millionaire, but lives a modest life.

He takes the time to know the people, the situation.

He then quietly takes out his checkbook.

He has helped a family start a small business.

He quietly gives to our pastor's fund on occasion.

I bet he tithes to the church.

When Jesus asks him to show him his bank statement, I imagine God will say,

"Well done, good and faithful servant."

Jesus tells us that faithful stewards or managers are people who take care of precious things that are not their own

Jesus tells a parable- meant to disturb and disrupt.

It confounds us.

Jesus appears to have the master or God praising clever and creative accounting.

This manager cooks the books and is commended.

"No fair, Jesus!"

I think Jesus wants us to be just as creative and

to take initiative like the shrewd manager

when it comes to precious things that really matter to God.

Jesus is telling his disciples and the eavesdropping Pharisees to care more about the

reign of God and to love God more than our 401k, our bank account, our earthly home because we are all just here for awhile.

We are given life and all that we have is a gift from God.

We will eventually return to God.

In the meantime, our earthly home is like an RV- a temporary home- while we journey through this life.

Jesus says in God's house there are many rooms.

We trust that in this life and the next we will be provided for...like a trust fund.

All of Life is a gift and how we spend it matters to God.

Jesus commends us to use our energy, initiative and creativity to use it for loving God and loving our neighbor.

Will you and I be trustworthy managers, stewards, of these gifts?

With all the conversation surrounding September 11 and the anxiety over allowing Muslims to establish a Community Center and place of prayer and worship near Ground Zero, I was struck and inspired by one story of healing mercy born out of the ashes of grief.

Two Boston women were widowed on 9/11.

Their husbands were on the airplane that was hijacked and crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center.

Both women were pregnant, and already raising children.

They were drawn together over in this tragic act of violence that was both public and personal.

Their energy, initiative and creativity are amazing to me.

Last Saturday one of these women, Susan who is Jewish spoke at a Mosque in Boston where she lives. She invited them to give generously and help rebuild the lives of widows on children and to battle illiteracy and poverty in Afghanistan.

Susan Retik and Patty Quigley started an organization, [Beyond the 11th](#). They knew how difficult life became for them as widows left to care for families. They decided to reach out to widows living in horrible conditions in Afghanistan. This non-profit has, "assisted more than 1,000 Afghan widows in starting tiny businesses. It's an effort both to help some of the world's neediest people and to fight back at the distrust, hatred and unemployment that sustain the Taliban.

'More jobs mean less violence,' Ms. Retik noted. 'It would be naïve to think that we can change the country, but change has to start somewhere. If we can provide a skill for a woman so that she can provide for her family going forward, then that's one person or five people who will have a roof over their head, food in their bellies and a chance for education.' The author of the article writes, 'In times of fear and darkness, we tend to suppress the better angels of our nature. Instead, these women unleashed theirs,'" (www.nytimes.com/2010/09/09/opinion/09kristof.html?_r=1&ref=nicholasdkristof)

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God." Matthew 9:2

These women could have chosen hate, rage, and destruction.

But they decided to be a part of rebuilding lives.

Their energy, creativity, and initiative are amazing to me.

In the *Beyond Belief* documentary telling this story Susan's brother, Jim, a Jesuit priest, states,

"There's a way in which each of us makes small choices every day. And after a period of time those choices develop into a pattern. Each moral and ethical choice forms our identity. It seems to me that the terrorists who flew planes into the buildings on September 11th, they started making choices a long time ago — choices took them so far off center that flying a plane into a building seemed like the right thing to do. It's like any one of us. We choose our way into being ourselves. And I think that's what Patti and Susan do in little choices and in big choices. When given a choice between violence and love — they chose love. When given a choice between retribution and restoration of harmony — they chose restoring harmony. When given a choice between death and life — they've chosen life. That's just who they are. It's who they've come to be. It's who they've chosen to be. And because of that, their children are learning to choose life as well." -Jim Fleming, S.J., Patti Quigley's brother, in *Beyond Belief* (<http://www.beyondthe11th.org/index.php>)

Whoever is faithful in little things, is faithful also in much.
A trust fund manager cares for the property to the benefit of another.
As stewards and managers of God's trust, are we trustworthy?

This week most of us will not solve the energy problems,
run for public office,
write a book,
dine with the President,
convert a nation,
or be burned at the stake.

More than likely the week will present us with small opportunities to offer a cup of cold water,
dedicate a Habitat House,
visit a healthcare unit,
teach a Sunday School class,
tell a child a story,
bring our offering to worship
go to choir practice
feed a neighbor's dog.

...each choice a chance to master the love of God over the love of money.

The Rev. Laura Smith Conrad
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