

## 15th Sunday after Pentecost

*Note: This homily is based on Luke 16:1–13. Please read that passage to the congregation before preaching this homily.*

Through the parable we read today Jesus teaches his disciples to use what we have with generosity and faithfulness.

This parable follows on from a series of parables in chapter 14 in which Jesus taught that while God invites all sorts of people to his banquet, some chose to decline his invitation. Jesus taught the crowds that before becoming his disciple they need to give up living for themselves and instead follow Jesus. Chapter 15 follows with 3 parables of lostness - the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. God delights to see his lost children come home. Now as chapter 16 opens, Jesus gathers his disciples closer and taught the parable we heard today. This parable is about how disciples are to use what they have with generosity and faithfulness. Let's explore the parable.

The scene is easy to picture - a rich man has a steward - we might say an accountant - to look after his affairs. But the rich man has heard that the accountant is wasting his possessions. So the rich man calls his accountant in and asks to see the books.

Scene 2 - the accountant decides on action. He knows that he will be sacked, so in vs. 3-4 he says to himself,

*“What should I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I'm not strong enough to dig; I'm ashamed to beg. I know what I'll do so that when I'm removed from management, people will welcome me into their homes.”*

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The action he is about to take is focused on how he will secure his future.

Scene 3 - The accountant has limited time - urgently he calls those who owe the rich man. Two borrowers come - the first says he owes 900 gallons of olive oil. The accountant gives him his invoice and says, "Make that 400." The second borrower says he owes 1000 bushels of wheat. The accountant says, "Here's your invoice, make that 800."

Scene 4 - Jesus concludes the parable with the response of the rich man, who says, "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly."

The master did what? He **commended** the dishonest accountant. That response seems so shocking. We'd at least expect the rich man to be really angry. We'd expect Jesus, who loves righteousness, to condemn the accountant. Instead, Jesus congratulates the accountant for acting shrewdly. For being wise. Before we explore the accountant's shrewdness, we need to answer the shocking aspects of the parable.

The fact that the rich man was not angry with the accountant's actions means that the rich man was not losing out. How come? In Jesus' day the accountant could set his own fee, and he did that by adding an interest charge or his commission to the transaction. It would appear that the accountant decided to reduce the amount owing by sacrificing his interest or commission. No doubt the borrowers would be delighted with this and would reckon that they owe him a favour in the future. Remember that was the accountant's aim - he wants to ensure that he has some security in the future. Notice that his action was not evil or wrong - he just gave up some of his commission. You might say, he was smart! The accountant chose to be generous to the borrowers, so they might help him in the future.

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Jesus told the parable for a purpose and he had used it to teach the people. What's he getting at? We can see the point Jesus is making in vs. 8:

*“For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.”*

*“The people of the light”* are the Jews. Jesus is saying that he has noticed that the people of the world, the non-Jews, are shrewd - they are wise, or sharp, or prudent in the way they do life. In vs 9 Jesus urges his disciples likewise to be shrewd, to be wise, to be smart. So he says in vs. 9:

**9** *“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”*

By *“eternal dwellings”* Jesus is thinking of heaven - he is calling his disciples to be shrewd, to be wise, to be sharp in the way we live in this world by making decisions with our eyes looking forward to his kingdom, to heaven.

Jesus warns that there will be a time when worldly wealth will go. The collapse of the share market, severe global disasters, a long period of bad weather - all cripple our financial situation. Jesus is saying while you have your wealth, be shrewd and be generous with your wealth. A generosity which has an eye on heaven - use your wealth to help people become disciples of Jesus too.

In this parable Jesus urges us to be shrewd, to be wise, to be smart and to use your wealth to build or grow God's kingdom. His assurance to you in vs. 9 is that he will welcome you into your eternal dwellings.

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Generosity looks outside ourselves and aims to benefit others. God is the origin of generosity - he who sent his only Son to achieve his rescue mission for us. The nature of Jesus to give and give is seen at the cross where he willingly chose to lay down his life to redeem his people, whom he loves so dearly.

Our generosity does not only apply to money. We can be generous in all sorts of ways - with our time, our energy, and our abilities. In giving of ourselves to meet the needs of another, we build strong relationships. Jesus encourages us to use the abundance of what we have to build relationships which endure into eternity. Using our generosity to enable others to come to faith in Jesus, will grow relationships which endure into eternity.

What's the take-home message of the parable. This unusual and surprising parable helps us grasp that being generous is to be prudent and wise. Pray for the gift of being generous, and for opportunities to share your trust in Jesus. Thank God for giving you the opportunity to use your life to reap lasting relationships into eternity.