

## Lectionary 25 Proper 20 C 16

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September 18, 2016

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.  
Amen.

I will say right off the top I do not like this parable. Like many of you I struggle to find a good and straight forward meaning from it. As you read the parable, it sounds as if Jesus is commending the dishonesty of the manager and the way he deals with the rich man's money. It is clear that the manager was not doing things properly, and now that he is caught, does not want to admit to it, but furthers the deception in order to save his own skin as it were.

The manager seems not to want to take responsibility for his own actions as he works to accomplish his life goals. That is until he is faced with the reality that soon his fate might be joined with those who he had cheated in the past. Now since the rich man might be kicking him out of his position of privilege, he might need to rely upon the less privileged around him. So he works to gain their favor. It is clear that the manager knows how to play the game, to live as the culture expected him to live.

Yet it is the other part is this parable that often disturbs us as well. Here Jesus talks about money as he often did in his teaching and in his parables. And whenever there is discussion of money in church, the pastors as well as the members get nervous. We all get that guilty feeling within us as we think or believe we should be doing more in support of the church and its ministries. At the same time we look at our own financial circumstances and conclude we are doing the best we can do. But the guilt sometimes still remains as we work to decide how it is that we live as children of light, as people of faith in a world which has different values and motivations and expectations.

We live in a world, especially here in the US, which prides itself on the ideal that we are all self made men and women, working hard so to can accumulate the wealth we need to retire and live the good life, to take care of our kids and

September 18, 2016

grandkids, or whatever our wants in life might be at that moment. We claim to do it on our own and then wonder why others are not doing the same thing. We accomplished it now they need to work just as hard and they will too.

While at the same time we understand ourselves as good, faithful people trying to live out our faith in the world. So we live each day with this struggle and tension as we work to find a balance between the two in life. We are faced with the question of 'How is it that we can live faithfully tending to the needs of others and at the same time keep our own needs front and center so we might achieve our desired goals for our future?'

~~Now I want to calm your anxiety by saying this will not be a stewardship sermon asking for your money. Because I know that most all of you are doing your best and do continue to support the ministries of this church. Because I believe that God is at work in your lives guiding you and instructing you as you support FELC and the mission we all share.~~

But I think this parable is disturbing and confusing to us because it reflects life back to us more than we want it to. The parable reflects life in a few ways. First it reminds us that wealth however ones defines it, is both a blessing and a responsibility. We are reminded over and over in scripture that we are blessed to be a blessing to others. That the accumulation of wealth is not a bad thing, but the manner and the use of that wealth makes a difference, not only in our lives but in the lives of others, for the mission of the church and for the sake of the world.

The second way it reflects life is we have seen ourselves in the place of the manager. One day or one moment we are successful and making a name for ourselves. Then the next we become aware that all we had is in jeopardy, that wealth and status, power and privilege can be fleeting.

September 18, 2016

Then when the power or the wealth or the status we once had is gone or it is threatened, we are reminded why we are here in the first place, at those moments in life, when the crisis comes that we are able to see the presence of God being active in our lives. Then we better appreciate and understand that God created us to love and to care for each other and not to separate ourselves according to wealth or status or power or privilege.

One of the commentaries I read this week said this about this parable. "It is not about our need to choose God over money. The Gospel is not that easy, as much as we want it to be. Jesus is not calling out the rich. Jesus is calling out our loyalties, not only to God, but also to that which in your life enables you to be who God has called you to be. That is, we are no good to God if we are not good to ourselves. Being good to ourselves is not an act of sacrifice or self-care or even self-serving, it is an act of salvation, being and existing in a way that you believe you are saved so as to make possible that others might see God's salvation is for them."

To believe you are saved so to make it possible that others might see God's salvation is for them. Jesus makes the observation about the manager that the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. He lifts up the very tension to which we live each day, that is how do we live as a child of light, seeking to serve and care for others in a darkened world focused on its own needs and desires.

Here the words of Paul to the people of Philippi encourage us as well; "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.*"

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It is our ability to shine like stars in a darkened world, to live as children of light so that we might be who God has called us to be. Then it does not matter if we are one of wealth or status or power or if we are struggling not sure of where we will live or if we have what we need for tomorrow. That we are able to live out of the tension to serve and love our God and our neighbor, supporting our church and God mission in the world as we live believing you are saved making it possible that others might see God's salvation is also for them.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

*Pastor Michael*

### Philippians 2:12-15

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.