

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, September 18-24 (C) - Luke 16:1-13

Discipleship: *A New Shrewdness*

Focus Question: *How are you faithful in caring for what God has entrusted you?*

word of life

“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.” Luke 16:10 (NRSV)

Read Luke 16:1-13

When Jesus told parables, he often left listeners a bit confused. Such is the case with the parable about the dishonest manager.

1. *What do you know about parables?*
2. *Why do you think Jesus told parables?*

The parable describes a rich man who after discovering his steward is dishonest fires him. But first, the rich man expects some accountability from his steward. Some might question the wisdom of the owner to allow his employee additional time to continue his dishonest practices.

3. *How shrewd is the rich man?*

The steward is desperate and takes advantage of this delay before his last day of employment. Since he has already offended his boss, he chooses to befriend the debtors of the master. Consequently, the steward summons each of his master’s debtors, lowers their debt, and accepts their money. He doesn’t just reduce the debt by a small amount, but cuts the debt in half for some of the people. In doing so, he hopes to be welcomed into their homes.

4. *What do you think of the practices of the steward?*
5. *How would you respond if you were one of the debtors?*

The master discovers the activity of the steward and commends him. Commends him? That’s right! Jesus concludes this parable with a surprise ending. “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.” (Luke 16:8-9 NRSV) This is not a parable of justice with the manager getting his due punishment.

6. *What is the point of the parable?*
7. *Why is Jesus commending dishonesty?*
8. *Or is he commending a certain type of creativity and shrewdness?*

Most Biblical scholars have been mystified by this parable. It does not appear to be consistent with the values of Jesus. Yet, it is consistent with Jesus encouraging people to wake up, be aware of the times, take advantage of the opportunity, and to risk for the sake of Jesus. Followers of Jesus are not to stay in a closet to avoid engaging in a world full of challenges and decision-making. At least the steward acted with diligence and speed to protect himself and his interests.

Some suggest this parable is too absurd with no one expected to believe it. Those who are dishonest, including some in the religious community can not expect to be commended. Or do they? At least the steward did not add interest to the account and charge too much. Then the debtors would have been angered rather than grateful towards the master and the steward.

9. *What would you ask Jesus about this parable?*

word among us

The teacher emphasized to the class the importance of submitting assignments on time. For weeks, the teacher had reviewed the date for the upcoming report. There would be no exceptions. Significant points would be lost if the report was late.

On that date, Sam realized on the bus he had left his airplane report at home and had no way of retrieving it until the next day. Well, actually he had not completed the report. Truthfully, he had not begun it. Unfortunately, that was his habit. But, he quickly went to work creating amazing paper airplanes on the bus. By the time he reached the school, he had a whole fleet of planes which he proudly carried into the classroom and flew them to the teacher's desk. The teacher shook her head and said, "Ok Sam, I've got to give you some credit for creativity. At least you pulled something together."

1. *Why would the teacher commend the student?*
2. *What are other examples of someone being commended in surprising circumstances?*

Sometimes in the church we leave our business sense at the door and forget our common sense. We give people jobs in the church who do not have the skills or the desire to produce excellent work. We do not keep our property, buildings, newsletters, websites, and brochures at the same standard as our workplaces. We assume the congregation does not need those components found in many workplaces such as a mission statement, goals, a planning process, and opportunities for evaluation.

3. *What might be gained if your congregation became shrewder (in the best sense of that word)?*
4. *What might be lost?*

Jesus concludes the parable with some general comments, not tightly connected to the parable, "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much." (Luke 16:10 NRSV) In many ways the steward was not faithful in caring for the master's goods, but he was extremely diligent in acting with speed about his limited opportunity to create friends.

5. *What have you been entrusted by God to care for?*
6. *Do you consider that you been entrusted with a little or a lot?*
7. *What has your congregation been entrusted to care for?*

It is easy to get caught up in the riches of this world. Once more, Jesus offers a warning about splitting our allegiance between Jesus and money. We cannot have two masters vying for our attention. Somehow we will end up resenting one. Hopefully, it will not be Christ.

8. *What competes to be master of your life?*
9. *How do we end up serving other "things" than God?*
10. *How might we be shrewd in making choices to follow Jesus?*

Prayer

Ruler of all, rule my life. Show me ways to be shrewd in making decisions about following you. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Amos 8:4-7

last word

Ponder one common or business sense suggestion for your congregation and offer it with love.



Daily Discipleship

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