

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, September 18th, 2022
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Being Shrewd
Proper 20 (c)
Luke 16:1-13

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Praise the name of the LORD.

Blessed be the name of the LORD!

From the rising of the sun to its setting, praise the name of the LORD.

We will bless God's holy name now and evermore.

The glory of the Lord is high above the heavens,
but God raises up the poor and needy on the earth.

So we will sing God's praise.

Let us worship God.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God our Creator,

You sustain your creation

as the source of life for every precious thing.

You have given us more than we could ever earn or deserve,
and so we offer you our love and loyalty,
for without you, we would not be.

Receive our worship this day, O God.

Speak to us in the sounds and silence of this hour,
and amaze us

with your promise of new life revealed in Jesus Christ,
and your power at work in us and among us through the Spirit.
Amen.

Opening Hymn # 274: "Crown Him with Many Crowns"

Crown him with many crowns,
 the Lamb upon the throne:
 hark, how the heavenly anthem drowns
 all music but its own!
 Awake, my soul, and sing
 of him who died to be
 your Saviour and your matchless King
 through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life,
 who triumphed o'er the grave,
 and rose victorious in the strife
 for those he came to save.
 His glories now we sing
 who died and rose on high,
 who died eternal life to bring,
 and lives that death may die.

Call to Confession

Prayer of Confession

**Generous God,
 You have enriched us with life worth living,
 but we confess we often squander your good gifts.
 We have wasted our time and energy,
 but held tightly to things we think we need.
 Forgive our foolish priorities
 and those times we overlooked the needs of others.
 Inspire us to live more generously,
 trusting your goodness to sustain us always.**

Assurance of Pardon

Friends in Christ, while it is true that we have squandered God's good gifts,
 it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ.
 Trust the mercy of God, and be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.**

**For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen.**

Responsive Reading

Question 73. What is the ministry of the church?

The Lord continues his ministry in and through the church. All Christians are called to participate in the ministry of Christ. As his body on earth we all have gifts to use in the church and in the world to the glory of Christ, our King and Head.

Mt 16:18, 1 Cor 12:27-28, 1Cor 7:7

Question 74. Why then does the church have ministers?

While all believers have the same status before God and the same task to share the gospel, not all have the same office or function. Christ has given his church ministers of word and sacraments to equip it for its ministry in the world and to build up his body.

Eph 4:11-12, 2 Cor 4:4, 2 Cor 5:18-19

Question 75. Why are they called “ministers of Word and Sacrament”?

The word ‘minister’ means ‘servant.’ As servants of God, ministers are called in Christ’s name, to present God’s message, celebrate his sacraments, and care for God’s people. To this office Christ calls both men and women. The church’s task is to confirm the validity of this call, to educate and examine candidates for the office and work of the ordained ministry.

2 Cor 6:4, 1 Cor 4:1, Gal 3:28

Music Ministry: “To Touch the Heart of God” by Choir

Prayer for illumination

(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

Luke 16:1-13

The Parable of the Dishonest Manager

16 He also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. ² And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ ³ And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’ ⁵ So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ ⁷ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’

He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' ⁸The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. ⁹And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

¹⁰"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. ¹¹If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹²And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Children's Hymn # 294: "Hallelujah"

Hallelujah, hallelujah,
hallelujah, hallelujah,
hallelujah, hallelujah,
hallelujah, hallelujah!

He's my Saviour, He's my Saviour,
He's my Saviour, He's my Saviour,
He's my Saviour, He's my Saviour,
He's my Saviour, He's my Saviour.

Sermon

I read a story about Latrell Sprewell, a former basketball professional, this week and it reflects very much the thinking of the world where there is a focus on wealth.

When he signed a contract with the Minnesota Timberwolves, he was not happy because he thought he deserved a bigger contract. He told the media that he was disgusted with his one-year, \$14.6 million dollar contract. When a reporter asked him why he did not try to help his team win the NBA championship and then renegotiate a bigger and better contract, he replied, 'Why would I want to help them win a title? They're not doing anything for me. I'm at risk. I have a lot of risk here. I got my family to feed.'

Let's put that in perspective, Sprewell was making \$40,000 per day, more than most people and even some families make in a year. This is the type of focus that people have on money in the world and when they have this type of focus, they can lose focus on other things that are important in this world and the things of eternal importance.

So how are we as Christians meant to think about money and material wealth? Today we are going to take a glimpse into how Jesus teaches us to think about money and wealth in the teaching he gives on the shrewd manager.

This is considered by many to be one of the most confusing of his teachings in the scriptures. It is often described as a problem parable, because it presents a unique problem to people who are trying to learn from it; there is no clearly good person in the story. The manager is obviously not a good person, we do not know enough about the rich man to see the good in him, the people who have their debts reduced are certainly questionable in their acceptance of this sudden and surprising turn of events.

On top of that it is a teaching on money, and people usually are not comfortable talking about money in a worldly setting yet alone in a church. However, if we look at the scriptures, we will learn that Jesus was very aware of money and the issues that the pursuit of wealth created for his faithful. Out of the roughly forty parables and teachings of Jesus that appear in the New Testament around one third of them deal with wealth and worldly possessions.

When we first read this teaching, it seems as if Jesus is approving of the managers financial mismanagement, however we know that he would never approve of sin, so what is the real Christian behavior he is encouraging in this scripture?

The story begins off simply, it has two main characters, a rich man, and his manager. It was quite common then, as it still is now, for people who are extraordinarily rich to hire investment managers, or financial advisors to look after their wealth. They often do this because it is a full-time job ensuring that their money is at work earning them more and they do not want to work when they could be enjoying their wealth. The trust their manager to ensure that their wealth is being nurtured and consistently growing in the right way. This means that the manager often has full access and control over all aspects of the rich persons wealth both in finances and in properties.

Now this rich man has been informed in some way that his manager is 'wasting his possessions' and he knows he must act quickly and decisively or other might be tempted to do the same. So, he calls his manager to him lets him know that he is aware of the mishandling of his wealth and that he must turn in the accounts he is responsible for as he is being fired.

The scripture does not tell us how the manager was dishonest, it does not elaborate on the relationship, it is simple and straightforward. The fact the manager was dishonest is believable because we do not see him try to defend himself of the charge of mismanagement.

The rich man wanted an honest accounting of the books so he could know just how much damage had been done, and his manager knew that the second he gave his

employer the books he would know of all the wealth that had been mismanaged. That would ruin his career and make him unemployable not just in that region, but also in all of the social circles in which the rich man was involved.

He knows that this means that his only option for work will be manual labor, and he has no interest in doing that work. Which only leaves the option of begging, and he is too filled with pride to beg, so he needs a new plan.

He calls every one of the accounts he manages for the rich man to him one by one. It was important that he spoke to each one individually, he did not want them to know what he was doing any more than he wanted his master to know.

He calls them and makes a deal with each of them. We are given just two examples of the deals that he makes but they are there to explain the significance of the amounts.

The first man owes one hundred measures of oil, this would be olive oil and one hundred measures are equal to rough 3400 liters. He tells the man to halve his debt which brings the debt to around 1700 liters of olive oil. That is a lot of olive oil, especially when you consider that it takes seven thousand olives to make a liter of olive oil. The amount of time and labor to get a single liter of oil in Jesus's day was immense. People went and knocked the olives from the trees with sticks, then gathered them, cleaned them, and compressed them to get the oil. Each olive tree produced roughly enough oil for three liters of oil a year, meaning it would have taken a lot of trees, a lot of labor and a lot of time to produce the 1700 liters that he had just been discounted. In fact, many commentators believe based on the average size of olive farms in the region at the time this was almost 3 years' worth of crops and labor.

Next, he calls in a man who owes one thousand bushels of wheat and tells him to make it eight hundred. Once again, a huge discount in time, labor, and product, at least a full year's crop. It is very likely that the dishonest manager continued to do this with every person who was in debt to the rich man, building up good will with each of them as they walked away with the burden of what they owed significantly.

The dishonest manager knew what he was doing. He lived in a culture that traded in honor, and when you owed someone, it was on your honor to repay the debt. In an honor culture, your status was determined by your word, and in discounting the debts of these people he had earned a debt of trust with each of them. He did it to every one of the accounts he managed creating a situation in which the rich man could not go back and removed the discounts without losing honor and a place where all those who had been given a discount would require one another to uphold the debt that was owed to the dishonest manager so that they did not lose honor.

This is where the confusion about this scripture teaching really sets in. The master learning of all of this commends the dishonest manager for his actions. He tells him that he did well acting shrewdly.

Shrewd comes from the Greek word “φρόνιμος” (fronimos) which means to act prudently or wisely. Often when we hear shrewd, we believe that it has a negative meaning, but it actually is a positive thing. The dishonest manager had known that every one of the debtors would gladly take the deal he offered them because of their own self-interest. He also knew that because of that moment of greed and dishonesty that they would be honor bound to him to repay the action. He knew this because it was something that he himself would do. People of the world know how to use what they have, honestly and dishonestly to gain whatever it is that they desire.

That is the completeness of the story, there is no greatness, no good behavior to emulate. It is a story of corruption, fraud, theft, secret dealings, and self-interest above all else, so what are we meant to learn as Christians?

The rich man commends the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. There is a significant difference in between saying, ‘he commended the clever Stewart for acting dishonestly’ and ‘He commend the dishonest steward for acting cleverly.’ The truth is that the rich man was commending the dishonest steward for his cleverness in creating this his own safety net in this situation and that is critical to our understanding of the scriptures.

Jesus is not endorsing sinful behavior. He is not approving cheating other people, or dishonest backroom money dealings. Instead, he was giving the disciples a lesson in how shrewdly non-Christians can act in their own self-interest. He is teaching them that non-Christians take what they have and use it for their own best interests and Christians need to learn to do the same, that Christians should learn to act with shrewdness in regard to what they have been blessed with by God in this world, through acts of caring and foresight.

The first lesson we are given is in regard to our own wealth.

Luke16:9

⁹And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

Unrighteous wealth is the pursuit of wealth for the benefits of worldly significance. Pursuing money as your idol in other words. Christians are instead called to use the worldly blessings they have to glorify the Kingdom of God. This is not just a worldly physical expenditure but an eternal spiritual investment into the kingdom of Heaven.

J.C. Ryle said, 'that a right use of our money in this world, from right motives, will be for our benefit in the world to come. It will not justify us. It will not bear the severity of God's judgment, any more than other good works. But it shall be an evidence of our grace, which shall befriend our souls.'

We do this by tithing to our church. Tithing pays for the minister who teaches the people the word of God and go out into the community supporting others, tithing pays for programs the church runs for their own congregants and in the community, tithing pays for the building where the congregants meet, and the community can come to freely as a place of support and sanctuary. Tithing also goes to supporting mission trips and missionaries both at home and abroad, and by supporting Christian organizations that are in our communities.

We can tithe to God at a very personal level, by having a cup of coffee or a meal with someone, investing in others and perhaps being given the chance to share the good news of the Gospel of Christ with them through the relationships we develop.

The second lesson is in regard to stewardship of the things we have been blessed with in our lives.

Luke 16:10-12

¹⁰ "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?

¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

I have heard a million varied reasons why people do not tithe to the church. In fact, I think earlier in my life I considered many of them myself. Yet we need to remember that all we have been given here on earth comes as a blessing from God. It is not ours and we do not get to take it with us when we go.

Many people say that they would give more often to the church and charities if they just had a little more money. Yet the truth is that this is rarely the case. Many people have given the exact same amount to the church their entire lives regardless of how their financial situation changes.

There is a story of a man who came to Peter Marshall, former chaplain of the United States Senate, with a concern about tithing. He said: "I have a problem. I have been tithing for some time. It wasn't too bad when I was making \$20,000 a year. I could afford to give the \$2,000. But you see, now I am making \$500,000, and there is just no way I can afford to give away \$50,000 a year."

Dr. Marshall reflected on this wealthy man's dilemma but gave no advice. He simply said: "Yes, sir. I see that you do have a problem. I think we ought to pray about it. Is that alright?"

The man agreed, so Dr. Marshall bowed his head and prayed with boldness and authority. "Dear Lord, this man has a problem, and I pray that you will help him. Lord, reduce his salary back to the place where he can afford to tithe."

This is true of many people they gave \$20 a week when they were just starting out in life and even when they had excess, they continued to give \$20 and used the rest in pursuit of their own wants and desires.

The lesson for all of us is, that he who is dishonest and unfaithful in the usage of the blessings that have been given here on earth, must not expect to have heavenly treasure. J.C Ryle said with great conviction, "Let the disciples remember that unfaithfulness in money transactions, is sure evidence of a rotten state of soul."

Which brings us to the third lesson, we are called to serve God alone and not God and money.

Luke 16:13

¹³ No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

There is no way to wiggle out of understanding this line of scripture. Even the study bibles make not that the translation is not 'should not serve' it is very clearly 'cannot serve.'

Christians struggle with money and wealth because it is necessary for our life and our wellbeing. However, money and the things which it brings can be alluring, enticing, exciting and distracting. If we do not learn to control and master our money and thoughts on its purpose it can overwhelm us and become our master, our false idol.

The shrewd manager had a lot to teach us in his dealings and all important for our service to Jesus while we follow him as disciples here on earth. Our blessings of time, talent, and treasure, particularly wealth do not get us into heaven. How we use them is not what gets us into heaven. But our usage of them reflects the saving grace which Christ has given to his people. If you are Christian, you will be generous with the things you have been blessed with, not seeking out anything in return, you will be faithful stewards over your blessings using them to build up the kingdom of heaven and to glorify God, and you recognize worldly possession for what they are temporary and serve God as your only Lord and Master.

Let us Pray,

May Your Grace Move Our Love

O sweet Savior Christ,
in your undeserved love for us
you were prepared to suffer the painful death of the cross:
let me not be cold or even lukewarm in my love for you.

Lord help me to face the truth about myself.
Help me to hear my words as others hear them,
to see my face as others see me;
Let me be honest enough to recognize my impatience and conceit;

Let me recognize my anger and selfishness;
Give me sufficient humility to accept my own weakness for what they are.
Give me the grace – at least in your presence – to say. ‘I was wrong – forgive me.’

God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
increase in us faith and truth and gentleness
and grant us part and lot among the saints.

Source: Polycarp

Music Ministry: “Holy Spirit” by Walter Gemmill

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspert offering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer
(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn: "O Church Arise"

O Church Arise and put your armour on
 Hear the call of Christ our Captain
 For now the weak can say that they are strong
 In the strength that God has given
 With shield of faith and belt of truth
 We'll stand against the devil's lies
 An army bold whose battle-cry is Love
 Reaching out to those in darkness

Come see the cross where love and mercy meet
 As the Son of God is stricken
 Then see His foes lie crushed beneath His feet
 For the Conqueror has risen
 And as the stone is rolled away
 And Christ emerges from the grave
 This victory march continues till the day
 Every eye and heart shall see Him

Pastoral Prayer

God in whom we live and move and have our being,
 each week our prayers join with those of Christians around the world
 to seek your healing grace for those in need
 and to pray for justice and mercy in your fragile creation.
 We thank you for the ways in which your Spirit can surprise us,
 bringing healing and hope in situations which cause us to despair.
 Encourage us when we feel overwhelmed.

We remember before you today people living face to face with war and violence,
 for the peoples of Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Myanmar, Ethiopia and Tigre, South Sudan
 and all those places where ancient hatreds burn.

We remember before you today people living with illness and suffering,
 for those struggling with disability or waiting for treatment,
 and for those who know grief or fear or loneliness

We remember before you people caught up in economic uncertainty,
 those worried for the future, or struggling to make ends meet

We remember before you today your whole creation in its increasing vulnerability.
Teach us how to care for the rips and tears in the fabric of the world you love
so that all your creatures may live together in health and wholeness.

As we leave here today, Lord, we pray for your Holy Spirit to be with us
and guide us to walk in Your light and in obedience to Your scripture
so that we may be the salt and light of this world.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our saviour
Who live and reign with You and the Holy Spirit
As the one true God
Now and forevermore, Amen.

Benediction

May the blessing of God,
the giver of every good and perfect gift;
and of Christ, who summons us to service;
and of the Holy Spirit, who inspires generosity and love,
be with us all.