

Please pray with me. May the meditations of my heart and the words of my lips be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, and may you add a blessing to the hearing and understanding of this message today. Amen.

As I said in the children's time this morning,
this is a complicated parable.

It's confusing.

Why does the rich man commend his manager for dishonesty?

Why does Jesus offer his followers such an
unsavory character as a role model?

In what sense are the "children of light" supposed to
take a cue from the "shrewdness" of a self-interested scoundrel?

Why is the parable followed by so many
convoluted platitudes and glosses?

Are we missing something,

or does this story in fact contradict everything

Jesus stands for in the rest of the Gospels?¹

These are the questions that made our brains hurt in
bible study this week.

I really would rather study the *Drosophila melanogaster*,
also known as a fruit fly, but here goes!

The first part of the text involves the relationship
between an owner who has considerable wealth
and his manager or in the Greek the term would be steward.

A steward was often given great latitude managing the estate,
but was always accountable to the owner.

This idea is where our term stewardship comes from.

We are stewards of all that God has given us.

We have a lot of latitude to steward our resources,
and we are always accountable to God.

Our stewardship theme for today is Choose Wisely.

We are asked to choose wisely how to use

¹ Thomas, Debie. www.journeywithjesus.net

our resources to avoid the trap at the center of this text, to embody the values of the kingdom of God, to support the coming of the kingdom of God, and in the process to discover the joy of living in the kingdom of God.

What is revealed in this parable is the human condition. We agreed in bible study that Luke's audience probably shook their heads, and said, "Yep, that dishonest steward probably did exactly that. I can see that happening."

To understand this parable and how it applies to stewardship, we need to consider the principal of arguing from the lesser to the greater. If something is true in lesser situations, how much more it is true in another, larger context.

This type of reasoning is commonplace in Jewish circles.

Luke's listeners would have been familiar with it.

Luke presents this argument elsewhere.

In Luke 11:5-13:

For example, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will [God] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask . . ."

The argument from the lesser to the greater is assumed in the parable of the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18:1-8.

If an unjust judge will eventually grant justice to a widow to keep her from bothering him,

how much more God will grant justice to the world through the return of Jesus.

In our gospel today, the argument functions as follows.

If a dishonest steward can accomplish something good through dishonest means, how much more can the disciples do when operating in the kingdom of God?

The Lukan Jesus comments,

“The children of this age are shrewder in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light” (Luke 16:8b).

The expression “children of light” is a designation, typical in end-time literature, for those who are committed to the kingdom of God. This comment implies that the children of light (those committed to the kingdom of God) should be as fresh, creative, imaginative, innovative, and bold in the service of the values and practices of the kingdom of God as are those pursuing the values and customs of the present broken world.

If the steward who stole from the owner could accomplish something to his benefit, how much more might God work through those who are working with God for a world that embodies the values and practices of the kingdom of God? For us here at Covenant, how can we be as creative and bold with the resources we have? How do we do the most good with what we have been given? How can we be creative and bold in helping those who need money, food, transportation, legal assistance, health care and mental health care?

Our stewardship theme asks us to choose wisely. Who or what will we serve? God or the accumulation of wealth and material things? To be clear, wealth and material resources are not evil in and of themselves. The problem can become our attitudes and actions. We can use our financial resources in service to the kingdom of God by using them to pursue justice, grace and mercy for all people.

The story of Oskar Schindler comes to mind. Schindler was a wealthy German industrialist during the Nazi era.

He operated his factories with Jewish slave labor from the concentration camps.

He was a boozier with a profligate lifestyle, characterized by bribery and lying, who treated many powerful Nazis as if they were close personal friends.

He was a dishonest manager with respect to Nazi expectations by treating Jewish workers better than he should have in his enamelware and munitions factories.

And he used deceit to save the lives of 1,200 Jews by sheltering them in his factory.

Towards the end of World War II, his munitions factory made shells that were manufactured not to fire properly.

He cheated and lied in the interest of a larger, life-saving, good.

What moments today might be times for civil disobedience as a route to dismantling oppressive social structures?

How might the church point to ways that our culture might increase access to material resources for all?

How do our financial commitments to the congregation, and the congregation's communal use of its financial resources, move in partnership of the coming kingdom of God?

Perhaps the level of confusion that this parable stirs is evidence of how remarkably important it really is.

It seems to go against all of our common understanding of fairness. And that's just it.

The Kingdom of God has little to do with fairness. It has little to do with keeping proper ledgers and making sure that everyone gets what is their due. And, thanks be to God for that!

The Kingdom of God is about relationships.

It is about reconciliation.
It is about forgiving our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.

It is not an easy story to hear.
It is sometimes an even harder story to live.
It doesn't make good economic sense.
Jesus had a funny way of not making sense.
It doesn't make sense to plant a weed in a garden.
It doesn't make sense to ruin a whole vat of flour with some leaven.
It doesn't make sense to turn your other cheek,
throw a party for people that can't invite you to theirs,
leave behind a flock because one sheep strayed,
or throw a party for your good-for-nothing son who
finally came back home with his tail between his legs.

It doesn't make sense that God would come to earth and take on flesh.
It doesn't make sense that God would claim me as his own,
or invite me to the Table of Grace.
It doesn't make sense that Jesus would
do all he could for a people that responded by nailing him to a cross.
It doesn't make sense that tomb was empty,
or that disciples have been able to
experience Christ in the breaking of bread for
centuries since he was said to be dead.

This is a strange parable.
It is a challenge.
It is a challenge to look at what canceling debt really looks like.
It is a challenge to take a close look at how I serve wealth over God.
It is a challenge to look at how I spend money,
how I save money, and how I treat others.
It is a strange one, all right.
Maybe that's how God intended it.² Amen.

²[The strangest of them all | The Fat Pastor](#)