

September 22, 2019 Priorities Luke 16:1-14

Jesus often taught using parables. Parables are fictional stories that teach a moral lesson, or a spiritual truth. Please notice something about that definition. A parable teaches a moral lesson, or a spiritual truth. In other words a parable tends to be extremely focused. It teaches a lesson. That is, it teaches one lesson. It is about one thing. We preachers have a tendency to over analyze the parables of Jesus. This detail means this. That detail means that. Parables are not a series of lessons. They seek to teach one thing. Example: The parable of the Prodigal Son teaches us that even though we may have become impossibly lost in the ways of the world, God is waiting for us to come to our senses, and rejoices when we find our way home to HIM. The parable of the Good Shepherd, teaches that although the Shepherd has many sheep, one lost lamb, becomes the focus of the Good Shepherd, and HE searches for that lost lamb until HE finds it, and then celebrates with HIS friends that the lost has been found.

So what is the single central lesson of this parable in Luke's 16th chapter? It presents us with a real world situation. A rich man had a money manager...a steward who was supposed to take care of his financial affairs. It has come to the attention of the employer that the manager has been embezzling funds. He has been caught. The steward is guilty. He is called to give an account and is told that he is going to be

terminated. Realizing that the loss of his position is a disaster...he is not young enough to do physical labour...and he is not about to accept the poverty or the shame of being reduced to begging...the steward calls in some of his employers customers who have outstanding debts. He blesses these debtors with unexpected mercy. In each case he forgives a portion of what is owed in return for future assistance.

The rich man, the steward's employer, is impressed by the wisdom of his dishonest money manager. He found a way to profit from his disastrous circumstances. What the rich man finds himself realizing is that worldly people are often more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of light. And the rich man begins drawing conclusions. Those who can be trusted with little, can be trusted with much. Those who are dishonest with little, will be dishonest with much. And ultimately he draws this conclusion. No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one or love the other, or be devoted to the first and despise the other. It comes down to this: We cannot serve God and Money.

In 1985 in the month of November, I received a letter that stated I had successfully completed the programme offered at Fuller Seminary leading to the Doctorate of Ministry degree. I had chosen to study at Fuller in California for several reasons. They were the only Seminary at the time who offered a degree in Church Growth. I wanted to know how a church grows. Secondly they were the only Seminary creative enough

to realize that most who would want to study such a subject would be involved in ministry in a congregation, and would not be able to financially afford to become a student full time for 2 years. They expanded the time line to 5 years. They assumed you would continue to work where you were. They expected students to do the balance of the work at home...reading and writing...on top of full time ministry. What they did require is that students come to Fuller for 2 weeks a year, and as a Presbyterian minister I was allowed 2 weeks of study leave time per year. During that 2 weeks I was in class 8 hours a day. I had to demonstrate on the first day of the 2 weeks that I had read and wrestled with 5,000 pages of published material, (a reading list). And I had to pay the required fees before the two weeks began, and of course cover my air fare and living expenses while on campus. The letter ment, I had done all of that for 5 years. And it meant that my dissertation had been accepted by the faculty at Fuller. I received these bars on the arms of my gown in December of 1985 along with a parchment from Fuller Seminary.

My family celebrated by taking me to see a movie. It was the Clint Eastwood western entitled "Pale Rider." The Pale Rider is a figure in John's Revelation. He brings judgement on the unjust "and Hell follows after him." (Revelation 6:8) Needless to say, The Pale Rider is a preacher who is as capable with a six gun as an avenging angel. He saves the poor miners from those who greedily want to destroy their community and steal their legal claims to mine the ground where they live.

There is a scene in which the villain tries to buy off the preacher with promises of a new church, fine clothes, and a very comfortable living. The preacher declines the offer because it would not work...as Luke has written, and Jesus said, "Man cannot serve God and money."

We all recognize there are several realities we face as individuals and as a church. We cannot function without money. As families and households we face expenses. As families and households we have to pay our bills. That is a reality. Sometimes a hard reality. There is a difference between using money and serving it, such that the accumulation of wealth becomes the reason for living. I am under no illusion about our church family. So far as I know, none of us is what could be described as independently wealthy. And the goal of this message is not intended to make anyone feel guilty about what they do or cannot afford to give.

On the contrary, I am taking this opportunity to say thank you for the support you have given to the church and its work thus far in this year. Having accumulated a surplus over operating expenses over the last 8 years we chose through our Board and Session to spend some of that surplus in this calendar year. We made improvements to our Church building as part of the stewardship of caring for the property, its appearance and its efficiency. We did our part by which I mean what was asked of us, by our Presbytery and we supported the budget of our denominational family, The Presbyterian Church

In Canada. Some would say we simply paid our bills. I would not reduce it to that, but no matter how it is described, I am expressing gratitude to you for supporting these causes.

We did something else. We supported the Mully Family Orphanage in Kenya. We made a gift to the hospice located in Madoc, to help with their heating bill. We helped a Presbyterian congregation other than our own with a gift of financial support. Our people have supported our aboriginal people in Canada. And I suspect some of us will support relief efforts in the Bahamas through Presbyterian World Service and Development at 50 Wynford Drive. Were we seeking to serve our money....some of these things would not have been done and we would have more money in the bank than we do. We have consciously put helping others ahead of building a bank balance.

As we begin this Fall season we are one of the more healthy small congregations in our Presbytery. I wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you while we are in mid-stream for your support of our faith values, and the sharing of your financial gifts for the work of God represented in St. Andrew's. We are not the best church that ever was. But I believe God has blessed us in numerous ways through the people we have and the resources we have received. Thank you on behalf of The Presbyterian Church In Canada. Keep doing what God is visibly blessing. Be open to the leading of His Spirit. And above all, praise the name of Jesus each time that we gather together.

Let us pray;

Lord thank you for blessings received. Thank you for challenges that have been defined, and addressed. Thank you for the opportunities that we have shared in that have allowed us to lighten the burdens carried by others. We know that YOU Lord have made use of us in such a way that love has been expressed, and that in the midst of the course of this year our faith has grown. Continue to show us ways to serve YOU that involve local involvement, Canadian commitment, and the caring for people who live in other nations than our own. May the name of Jesus receive the glory and the honour and the praise. Amen