

“You Cannot Serve Both God and Wealth.”

Parables are all about seeing things in new ways.

Jesus tells a parable today.

One way into a parable is to examine it from each character and note - where is it surprising?

The surprise for the servant today is: he's fired. We don't know if he actually did wrong with his boss' finances or not. The boss may not even know, because the boss has fired the servant AND demanded the records.

One way or another, the servant has a choice before him. He is going to be without income. He knows he is too weak to work the fields; and he is too proud to beg. But he comes up with a crafty plan. He's already being fired for financial mismanagement - so why not use financial mismanagement to be sure he has a soft post-firing landing? He'll be able to couch surf with each person he helps out. Maybe one will even hire him.

So, to each of his boss' debtors he offers a sweet deal - steep discounts on debt just for showing up! Each debtor takes this offer. Shortly, every debtor is glowing with happiness for the servant and the boss.

After the debt fire-sale, the servant hands the accounts over to his ex-boss. We're told his boss commends him, complements him, for his shrewdness. We're NOT told he is rehired. He is simply complemented for his craftiness.

Jesus then also complements the servant and says to his disciples and to us, "use dishonest wealth to make yourself friends in eternal homes." Now that feels surprising to us, the audience.

Now what about the boss' perspective? I get word my employee or slave is mismanaging the my money. So, order the servant to hand over the accounting because he's fired.

When I get the accounting books from my servant, I see that yes, he has mismanaged the money. But if I go out and try to collect this, people will say I went back on my deals. The servant represented me. I'll get the ire of the town. Right now, the town is raving about me and the servant. He is very shrewd and got one over me. The servant's cunning is surprising, but I am stuck. Whether I continue to fire him or if I rehire him, he is going to be fine and I'm going to be out what I'm owed.

Now imagine we owe the boss. The boss' servant summons us. Offers us to reduce the debt. It's surprising! But sure. If my bank summons me to Espanola to meet at the branch and offers me 50% off my mortgage... I'll be shocked, but I'll take it. And I'll speak highly of the banker and the bank who did this for me. Wouldn't you take the same deal? 20% off your car debt as a "loyal customer discount!" 40% off your grocery bill just because. I think we'd all be happy and surprised.

But that's not the end of the surprises. The parable continues with Jesus' sayings - they're confusing too! Jesus tells us to make friends by means of dishonest wealth, and then immediately says whoever is faithful with a little, is faithful with a lot, and whoever is dishonest with a little, is dishonest with much. "If, then, you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?"

What? Jesus, you just told us to blow through other's wealth for personal gain and make friends. That seems pretty dishonest and unfaithful. And now you tell us if we can't be trusted with just a little, we'll not be entrusted with a lot?

Do you, or don't you, want us to be honest with money? Do you, or don't you, want us trustworthy with whatever little bit is entrusted to us?

Maybe Jesus is telling us to rob from the rich and give to the poor; or telling us to be honest and faithful regardless if someone is rich or poor...

Are you a bit shocked and confused? I am.

We understand clearly the last lines - you cannot serve both God and wealth. You cannot serve two masters because God and wealth demand different things. You'll love one and hate the other; or be devoted to one and despise the other. God and wealth are like oil and water.

Okay. Got it. But what does it look like to serve God over wealth?

I think that's what the parable before the sayings is about. I don't think this is a simple story of just give to charities and all is well. I think this is a call to radically change our economies and the way we think about money.

If we serve wealth, we'd want to do what is most financially sound; what is good for the economy; and what brings the biggest profit and biggest power gain to ourselves or our business.

If we serve God, we'd want to do what is best for the world; what is good for justice; what is loving.

The servant, who is not a child of the light, knows to take wealth and make it work for him. If we did the same, taking wealth and making it work for God, wouldn't this actually be being faithful with very little? Because our faithfulness is towards God, not the world. NOT stealing from the rich to give to the poor is being unfaithful.

If God can trust we'll do good with the dishonest wealth of earth, God will trust us with the true riches which is not money at all, but is a home in eternity.

Jesus - against trickle-down economics. Against interest. Against honest book keeping.

That is hard for me to get my head around. I often obey laws because they're laws. They must be there for a good reason. I married someone who is suspicious of laws and presumes laws help those in power keep their power. It has been revealing.

There are very good laws like stopping at stop signs. Their very good reason is to prevent accidents.

There are very bad laws like bank overdraft fees. They enrich the rich and further penalize the poor. Jesus, to me, seems to be saying we need to be shrewd when thinking about money.

We debate, endlessly, about minimum wage. If wages are not increased, more people are financially struggling. A report was just released Friday that 1 in 6 people in Sudbury are food insecure. I am sure that is the same here if not higher.

But if minimum wages go up, companies have to increase the cost of everything, right? So it is a wash. That wage is soon ate up by the increased prices.

But if we don't increase wages ... and the circle continues.

What if... what is the issue isn't minimum wages? What if it is maximum wages? Minimum wages force large companies to share some of their wealth with workers. Small companies are already sharing much of their wealth with workers. As minimum wages goes up, small companies suffer and big companies absorb the cost and know inflation will catch up and they'll be as profitable as they always have been.

So, what if we looked at maximum wages? The maximum amount a CEO can make, an investor can make, an individual can make, a company can make? The maximum amount any individual or their representatives can have in reserves?

Money that is hoarded drives up inflation. It takes money to make money, and so the rich get richer. How? By taking more from the poor. So, the poor get poorer. The rich's "assets" and the poor's "liabilities." The boss' wealth is what the working people owed him.

No matter how much we fight over the crumbs of the economic pie, they are still crumbs. The bulk of the world's money is held by just a few individuals. The bulk of the world's economy is just a few global companies. This is dishonest wealth - siphoned from every small town and city, every person - and hoarded.

I think, Jesus is saying if I ever am in the position to manage USA medical debt, I should slash it all. If I am ever in the position to delete zeros from a billionaire's account and add them to someone with \$10 in their name, I should. I think Jesus is telling me to demand a living wage AND a maximum wage and cook the books if I have to. I think Jesus is telling me to cheat when cheating helps the poor.

And that makes me panic! I hope it makes you uncomfortable too!

Parables are not about comfort.

Jesus is not always comforting.

Jesus is good news to the poor, and bad news to the rich.

And me, among the world's richest just by virtue of being born in North America, I get really uncomfortable with this message.

I imagine if I were born in one of the world's poorest areas, or fleeing Palestine, I would sure like this message. Yes - steal from the countries rich off of selling bombs to kill my mother. Yes, take the wealth of the global north and return it to the global south - where it is stolen from one extractive business, one slave, one child labourer at a time.

Yes. Lift up the low and lower the high. And me, Whitney, I am one of those high. Lower for Canada but high for the world. That is humbling.

And gives me insight into why the very rich panic to hear Jesus' words on wealth redistribution. Because I feel panic and I have a whole lot less to lose than Zuckerberg or Musk or any dictator!

And yet, the way I understand this parable today, is that money should be spent on friends, on community, on relationships, on the poor, and not locked away, even if that means intentionally breaking laws to share the wealth. Maybe I'll understand it differently in the future. Parables are like that.

But today, it gives me anxiety chills.

May God help me, and all of us, hear the good news and the challenge in our scripture. Amen.

Scripture Readings - Sept. 21, 2025 – for LCUCPC –

Psalm 113

Refrain: Allelu, allelu, allelu, alleluia! Sing and rejoice.

Allelu, allelu, allelu, alleluia! Sing and rejoice.

Sing and rejoice. (Alleluia!) Sing and rejoice. (Alleluia!)

Sing and rejoice. (Alleluia) Sing and rejoice!

Praise the Lord!

Praise, O servants of the Lord; praise the name of the Lord.

Refrain

One: Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore.

All: From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised.

One: The Lord is high above all nations and God's glory above the heavens. **Refrain**

One: Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high,
who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?

**All: God raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princesses, with the princes of God's people.**

One: God gives the outcast a home, and a family. Praise the Lord! **Refrain**



Luke 16: 1-13 (NRSV) The Parable of the Dishonest Manager

16 Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ² So he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager any longer.’

³ Then the manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position 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 dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’

⁵ So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ ⁷ Then he asked another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.

¹⁰ “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. ¹¹ If, then, you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No slave can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

May God’s spirit shape our understanding of these words.

And may they awaken in our hearts.