

2007 Sept 23 Luke 16:1-13 Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Once upon a time in a land far, far away was a man of great wealth named Ole who was tight as a clam. He wouldn't share his money with anyone, wouldn't give to the needy, wouldn't get to his church he wouldn't even spend it on himself. He kept his money buried in his backyard for fear that the bank would lose his money in a savings account.

Ole became old, frail and ill because he didn't spend the money to take care of himself or get the proper health care. When he knew his life was coming to an end so he called the pastor and asked if he would come for a visit.

He said to the pastor. "Pastor, you are an honest and honorable man ". I'm not perfect Ole but I do my best. "I trust you pastor". Why, Thank you. That's nice of you to say. 'I want you to do something for me. What would that be? I want you to take this. And he handed him a large garbage bag. The pastor opened it and he said. There is a lot of money here. There must be at least... 5 million dollars, Ole said. 5 MILLION DOLLARS. And you're giving it to me? Yes, because you see I am going to die soon. They say you can't take it with you but I'm going to.

I don't understand? I want you to take my money and after my funeral, after the graveside service, after every one has left, I want you to put my money in my grave. Then cover it up so the diggers won't see it.

So the man dies. They have his funeral and graveside service and when everyone had left, the pastor, took out his check book, wrote a check for 5 million dollars. He put it in the grave and covered it up.

That joke was pretty easy to follow. At least I hope it was. You could probably read that story and understand it. But there are some times when a person tells you the joke or a funny story and it doesn't make any sense. Then the person says, O I guess you had to be there.

The idea is that it would be funny or it would make sense, if you had been there. Maybe today's parable is like that. The parable at least on the face of it, doesn't seem to make any sense. I think this is one of the hardest reading or at least the hardest parables to understand. Jesus tells of a manager who wasn't doing his job. He is told to put his affairs in order because he is going to lose his job. So, the manager uses his boss's assets to win the favor of his clients so that they will be nice to him when he is without a job.

The rich man commends the dishonest manger for acting shrewdly, which seems weird for a parable Jesus is telling. If that wasn't strange enough, Jesus tells his disciples that they should be more like this dishonest manager.

Be like this dishonest manager? Maybe you had to have been there. Maybe we are missing something. Maybe there is some kind of joke we are missing. Maybe Jesus has a smile on his face when he says it. I don't think Jesus would tell us to be dishonest.

There are at least a couple of things we can glean from this parable. First of all this man, this dishonest manager is going to get sacked because he is wasting the rich man's assets. The manager should be bringing in money for him. Instead the resources are being wasted. So I think it is fair to say that one of the things Jesus wants his disciples to know is that they are not to waste resources. This is something Jesus' disciples of today need to remember too. We are not to waste resources.

Just as the Rich man doesn't want his resources wasted, Jesus doesn't want his resources wasted either. What are Jesus' resources? Jesus' resources are those things that he has entrusted us as his manager. We are the stewards of Jesus' assets. What would those resources be? That would be the time, talents and treasures you have been blessed with. Ole had a lot of money but he wasted it. He wouldn't use it to help those in need. He wouldn't even use it to help himself. The money would have been buried forever if not for the wisdom of the pastor. Ole might as well have burned the money for all the good it did.

We can look at ourselves. What do we have? What can we do? I remember going to Biloxi on a mission trip last year. We had people with carpenter skills, wiring skills, people with nursing skills, people who worked in the clinic and just listened to people who needed a listening ear. I used my ability to sweat. I spent two days in a bathroom with Dave Pagel but that's another story.

Jesus is like the Rich man who entrust the manager with his resources. He is trusting us to use those resources wisely.

Besides realizing that Jesus wants us use the resources we have been blessed with there is another thing this parable makes us think about. *Green's commentary on Luke presents another interpretation:*

By reducing their loan agreements so generously, the manager has done these debtors a significant favor;

No kidding he lowered one bill by 20% and another by 50%.

In this way, the manager has entered into his own relationship with his master's debtors, apparently themselves also persons of means. He has become their benefactor and, in return, can expect them to reciprocate by extending to him the hospitality of their homes.

In other words they owe him for the favor he did for them.

Keeping that idea in mind that if someone does something for you, you owe to them to reciprocate, to pay them back. Suppose we looked at Jesus as the manager. Not dishonest, just the manager. And suppose that we are the debtors who owe the debt. But instead of owing for olive oil and wheat suppose we owed for our sin for our lives.

And let us also suppose that Jesus comes to us and says: I've paid your bill in full. If the debtors owe the dishonest manager for lowering their debt what would you say we owe Jesus for our souls?

Christianity isn't about paying Jesus back for dying for us. But there is the Thankfulness and there is the responding to the gracious gift.

Think about it.

May God bless you this week in the knowledge and use of your resources and of the forgiveness of your debt. Amen?

Amen means it is true. So I ask Amen?