

Debts Are Tossed

September 18, 2022

Luke 16:1-13

¹Then 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.

²So 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. ⁴I 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?’

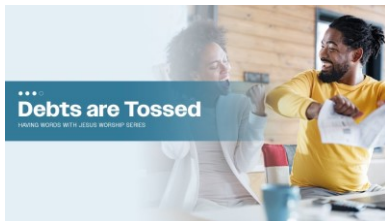
⁶He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’⁷ Then he asked another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’⁸ And his master commended the dishonest 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. ⁹And 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.”*

1st Timothy 2:1-5

¹ *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human.*



Today's gospel text continues the invitation to lean in, to listen, to examine our hearts as we have these words with Jesus. As has been the case, this week's text from Luke 16 is

challenging and calls us to wrestle today with the difficult topics of money and allegiance. We, like the manager and the rich man in today's parable, are lovers of money and of other things that bring us a sense of security. Maybe more than we like to admit. On the one hand, Jesus' words today are about priorities. There is a call in these words to approach the economic realities of this world not as an end to itself but as a means to build and create community and relationship. On the other hand, these words are about paying attention to the details. Here Jesus invites us to be faithful in the small things as a prelude to faithfulness in all things. In Paul's words to Timothy, we hear a clear call to pray for all things. As we begin this time together, let us pray...

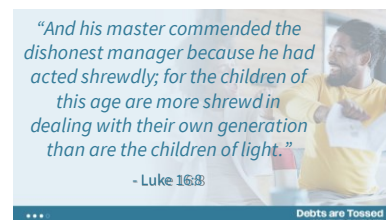
The parable of the shrewd manager is about a man who was called into account by his boss. Squandering his boss' money has landed him in hot water. In the little time that he has left in this management position he uses his power to influence people and to make friends. The boss then commends him for his shrewd wheeling and dealing. So, just what is Jesus talking about here? Well, money, yes. Although on the surface this teaching of Jesus is hard to fully decipher or really understand, Jesus is talking about money as he always does. Here too he is telling us that money is not as important as we often make it out to be. As a pastor once noted, "We print the words 'in God we trust' right on the god we trust." Sometimes this is too true.

Turning to Luke 16, we delve into the parable. The manager is first called to task for being unfaithful with the boss' money. He is squandering it. Realizing that he soon will be out of a job, he knows he needs to come up with a plan. In verse 3 the manager acknowledges that he is too weak for physical labor and too proud for begging. So he quickly comes up with a scheme so that when he is dismissed, he will be welcomed into people's homes. One by one he calls in the master's debtors. The first owes the master 100 gallons of olive oil. The shrewd manager says, "*Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.*" With the next, the debt of 100 containers of wheat is made into 80. And so it goes, debt after debt is reduced. As you can imagine, the shrewd manager made lots of new friends. Their indebtedness to him would allow him to survive after his current position is terminated. By using worldly wealth and power to his advantage, the dishonest manager is insuring his future care and provision.

Shifting from parable to application or teaching, in verse 8

Jesus says, *“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.” He goes on to advise his listeners to us *“dishonest wealth”* to make friends as well. What does Jesus mean by “dishonest wealth?”



Dishonest wealth is the currency of the empire – whether that is the Roman empire of Jesus’ day or if it is the modern empires of our day. It is the money in our pocket or wallet or purse. It is the funds attached to our debit and credit cards. It is the gift that we will put into the offering plate. It is the currency of a world that is passing. It is the wealth that is generated and tied to the realities of this broken and sinful world. It is the practices that many follow to make just a little more, a little bit extra. And Jesus says to use it well. Use it for the kingdom. Use it to build community and relationships. Use it to rescue people rather than enslave them. Use it to build people up, not to push them down. Use it to give away, not to hoard.

As hard as this parable is to read, there are many examples of how the wealth of this world is used to build community and to benefit others. From disaster relief to building schools and orphanages and wells, from scholarship programs to homeless shelters, from community gardens to hospitals – the wealth of this world can be used to lift up and rescue, to provide and nourish, to care for and protect. Here Jesus is speaking in ways that are contrary to the ways of the world.

Worldly money ‘laws’ tell us to get all we can, to gather and gather no matter who gets hurt or left aside. The laws of money tell us that our worth is measured by how much we have. The laws of money tell us that we must always desire to have more. The laws of money tell us that those who have money have power – power over others, power to make the laws of the land. The laws of money tell us to see the potential in others and in developing relationships with them. Not the potential they have as individuals but the potential in them to enrich and empower us.

Instead of living by these worldly money laws, Jesus invites us to build community and relationships. But we must be careful here. Jesus is not inviting us to do so only within these walls. Jesus is calling us to use our wealth to develop and nurture friendships with all those we can call neighbor. The call is not, however, simply to build the number of people in these green chairs on a Sunday morning. That might be one of the fruits of pouring into other people’s lives. But the overarching call is to simply love others as God’s children, and, more specifically, to love those who have no idea that they are children of God. As has been the case the last two weeks, these words from Jesus invite us to consider the question: how do we share this gift of faith?

Turn with me to 1st Timothy 2 as we gain insight in how to begin to share this gift of faith. In verses 1-3, Paul urges Timothy and all who will read these words to first pray.

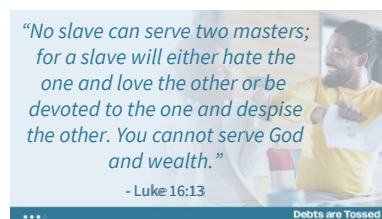
Here is how it is worded in the Message translation: *“The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our*



business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Savior God wants us to live.” Paul urges us to first pray and to pray for everyone because it is through prayer that we learn to think like God and that we learn to love like God. We must ask ourselves: are we willing to pray in this way – for everyone and anyone?

The answer to this question is important because, you see, the scope of our prayers is the barometer for our understanding of God’s reach and for our understanding of the depth and breadth and width of God’s saving intentions. Praying for those we love and for our friends – that is easy. But here Paul is also asking them and us to pray for our enemies. For the early church, this invitation was to pray for the rulers and government meant to pray for those who were persecuting and threatening the early church. That is a tough ask. Paul is inviting them to pray for those with power and money, for those who are following the worldly laws of money. Get, grab, accumulate and don’t worry about who is hurt or impacted by your greed. Yes, Paul says, pray for these folks too.

“This is the way our Savior God wants us to live.” Here Paul is returning to the idea of living according to God’s laws and not the laws of the world. We are reminded that God gave us the laws to live by. Primary is the law to love God and second to it is the law to love neighbor as self, even when it costs us something. In the context of today’s passage from Luke 16, Jesus encourages us not to seek and use money the way the world uses it, but to seek and use money for God’s purposes. Here, in verse 13, Christ says, *“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.”*

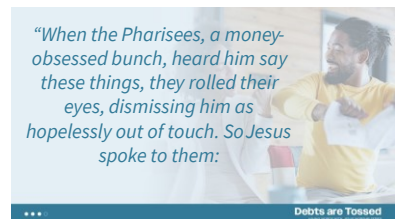


other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

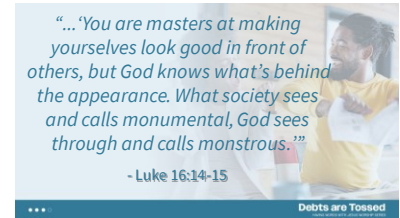
One cannot live by both the laws of money and the laws of God. It is not possible. We will grow to love the one and to hate the other. We cannot chase after both God and wealth. We cannot serve both God and wealth. So Jesus invites us to choose, to declare our allegiance.

Jesus makes his point crystal clear as we continue in Luke 16, now turning to verses 14 and 15. As we do, we remember that in Luke 15 Jesus told three parables about lost things in response to the religious leaders complaining about who he was hanging out with. If you took the time during this past week to work through the GPS questions, then you read and wrestled a bit with the parable of the lost son. In this story there are two sons – the younger son who ran away and squandered his inheritance and the older son who stayed home and dutifully obeyed his father. Both sons are far away from the father’s heart of love. Both sons are equally lost. The religious leaders are represented by the older son – dutifully obeying the laws of God but living far from God’s heart of love.

After telling the parable of how to use earthly wealth to build God’s kingdom, to use our wealth to develop and nurture relationships that grow God’s family, Jesus addresses the religious leaders. In verses 14 and 15, again from the Message translation, we read, *“When the Pharisees, a money-obsessed bunch, heard him say these things, they rolled their eyes, dismissing him as hopelessly out of touch. So Jesus spoke to them:*

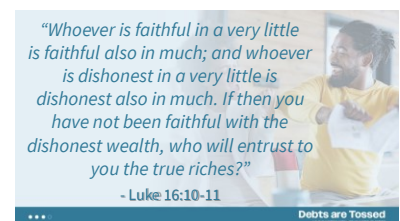


So Jesus spoke to them: ‘You are masters at making yourselves look good in front of others, but God knows what’s behind the appearance. What society sees and calls monumental, God sees through and calls monstrous.’” They appear good to the eyes of men, but God sees through that. According to the world’s ways, they are top-notch, even monumental. But to God they are monstrous.



The Pharisees and religious leaders are like us in this. One cannot serve both God and money. We will come to love the one and to hate the other. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were called to love the lost, to serve those in need. They were called to love God and to love neighbor. When those who love money more than God hear the call from Jesus to count the cost of discipleship, to seek the lost, to give all that one can to save the lost – well, they just roll their eyes and dismiss this man who is hopelessly out of touch with the hard realities of the world. Are we any different today? When Jesus challenges us resist the lures of this world, we too can roll our eyes and think Jesus is out of touch. Jesus knows the challenge we face. So he encourages us to start small.

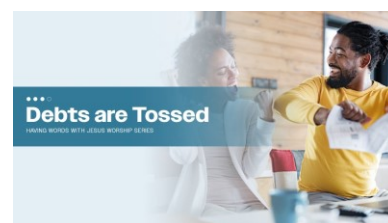
In verses 10 and 11 Jesus says, *“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?”* Learn to be faithful in the small things, in the day-to-day things, in the little noticed and quickly passed by things.



And then the true riches – relationships and family and hope and joy and peace and justice – then these too will be ours. Jesus is also inviting us to be faithful in the things that don't really belong to us – our earthly wealth and things – and then we will grow to be faithful in the things that are truly ours: our soul, our salvation, our relationships with God and one another, our ability to see God in the face of others. Day by day, may we strive to be faithful to the Lord our God and to our neighbors – in both the small things and in the eternal things.

Jesus calls us to pay close attention to all of the choices that we make and to be aware of the little compromises that we can make, almost without thinking. Compromise is simply the way of the world around us. We are called from that world and into God's kingdom. When we stray, we are invited to confess and repent, to turn back towards walking in the light and love of God. Doing so, we are freed from those burdens and the guilt and the shame of our sinful and selfish choices. Our debts are tossed, and we are once again invited to walk in step with the Lord our God.

Freed from the things of this world, we are freed to live to build the kingdom of God, day by day, person by person. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. In terms of your freedom from the things of this world, when have you surrendered something to God? How did that “open up” your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. When and how do you struggle with wealth or money or possessions? Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to toss aside that to which you are indebted.
- 3) *Study*. Read 1st Timothy 4:9-16. Which of these things needs more attention in your life? How will you give more attention to this practice in the days ahead?