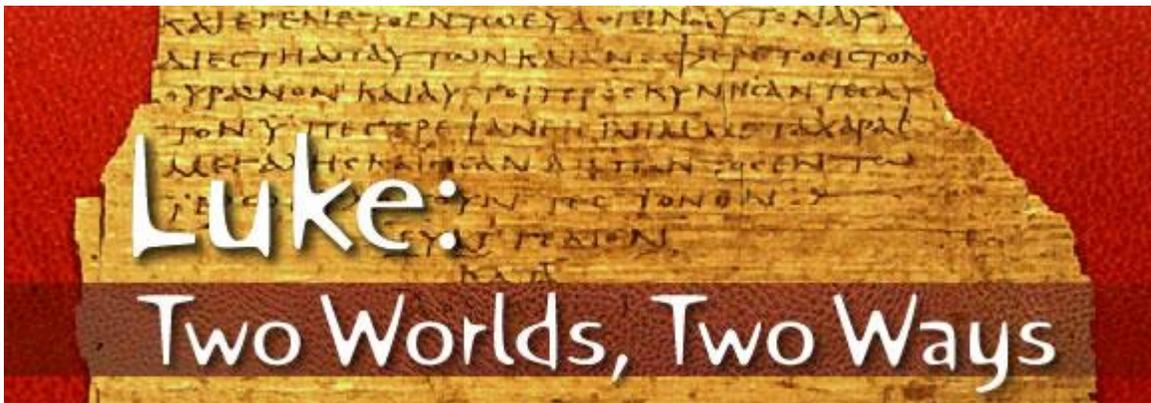


SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 22, 2013

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)
18th Sunday after Pentecost
7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: **Luke 16:1-13** (*The VOICE Bible*)
(www.biblegateway.com)

Message: **"Struggling to Find a Way to Live
in the World, and Yet Not of It!"**
Kekapa P.K. Lee



Another moral from this story: If you don't want your master to know about the wild raves you've been hosting in the olive grove, don't post the pics to your Facebook page!



Gathering in the Word

Today's scriptures help us to reflect on the social consequences and costs of turning away from GOD and the possibility that prayer and GOD-centered values can be a source of health in our personal and corporate lives together as the Church—the Body of Christ. We can read Luke 16:1-13 one, twice, three times and it's still difficult to understand. Let's see what the Holy Spirit teach us this morning!

Hearing the Word

Luke 16:1-13 (The VOICE Bible)

The *Parable of the Lost Prodigal Son* (Luke 15:11-32) ends. Jesus never reveals how it came out. Did the older brother join the party and reconcile with his younger, wayward brother? Or did he stay outside, fuming over the seeming injustice of his father's extravagant love? The story remains unresolved because it is, in fact, an invitation—an invitation to the Pharisees and other opponents of Jesus to join Him in welcoming sinners and other outsiders into the joyful party of the Kingdom.

16 Here's a parable He told the disciples:

Jesus: Once there was a rich *and powerful* man who had an **asset manager**. One day, the man received word that his asset manager was squandering his assets.

² The rich man brought in the asset manager and said, "You've been accused of wrongdoing. I want a full and accurate accounting of all your financial transactions because you are really close to being fired."

³ The manager said to himself, “*Oh, no!* Now what am I going to do? I’m going to lose my job here, and I’m too weak to dig ditches and too proud to beg.” ⁴ I have an idea. This plan will mean that I have a lot of hospitable friends when I get fired.”

⁵ So the asset manager set up appointments with each person who owed his master money. He said to the first debtor, “How much do you owe my boss?” ⁶ The debtor replied, “A hundred barrels of oil.” The manager said, “I’m discounting your bill by half. Just write 50 on this contract.” ⁷ Then he said to the second debtor, “How much do you owe?” This fellow said, “A hundred bales of wheat.” The manager said, “I’m discounting your debt by 20 percent. Just write down 80 bales on this contract.”

⁸ When the manager’s boss realized what he had done, he congratulated him for at least being clever. That’s how it is: those attuned to this evil age are more clever in dealing with their affairs than the enlightened are in dealing with their affairs!

⁹ *Learn some lessons from this crooked but clever asset manager.* Realize that the purpose of money is to strengthen friendships, to provide opportunities for being generous and kind. Eventually money will be useless to you—but if you use it generously to serve others, you will be welcomed joyfully into your eternal destination.

¹⁰ If you’re faithful in small-scale matters, you’ll be faithful with far bigger responsibilities. If you’re crooked in small responsibilities, you’ll be no different in bigger things. ¹¹ If you can’t even handle a small thing like money, who’s going to entrust you with spiritual riches

that really matter? ¹² If you don't manage well someone else's assets that are entrusted to you, who's going to give over to you important spiritual and personal relationships to manage?

¹³ Imagine you're a servant and you have two masters giving you orders. *What are you going to do when they have conflicting demands?* You can't serve both, so you'll either hate the first and love the second, or you'll faithfully serve the first and despise the second. One master is God and the other is money. You can't serve them both.

Some describe this Parable as the oddest and '*out-of-the-ordinary*' of Jesus' parables; and it follows a parable we're more familiar with—The Parable of the Prodigal Son!

Different Bible translations describe our main character in this Parable as the:

- ✓ Shrewd manager
- ✓ Dishonest manager
- ✓ Unjust steward
- ✓ Unrighteous steward
- ✓ Prudent steward
- ✓ Asset manager (The VOICE Bible) = a person that manages someone else's money, stocks, and shares, etc.

The hero of our Parable this morning is an anti-hero: he's a crook, a swindler, and a cheat! Some Christians have been bothered by this Parable and the lessons we learn

from it—because in the end—this shrewd asset-manager turns into a kind of decent and proper person!

So this asset-manger of a wealthy man's estate is about to get fired; so he calls for his boss. His boss tells his asset-manager to prepare one final report to be handed in at his exit interview—and that would be that, so this man has to think fast. Since his boss want one last presentation of the ledgers (*a book with columns for debits and credits, on which to transcribe financial records*) before the manager gets canned and fired—the manager decides that now is as good a time as any to cook the books (*to alter facts or figures dishonestly or illegally*) in such a way as to make him look good.

So he calls in a number of his boss' wealthier clients and *cuts their debt-load in half*. When in startled amazement they ask why?—the manager winks at them and says, "*Don't ask, but just remember I did you a favor once, all right?*" In this way the manager tries to gain favor by flatter and sweet talk—in this way they might give him a job, lend him money, etc.

So his boss gets wind of all of this—but he's not angry!

- ✓ He approves what the asset manager has done!
- ✓ He claps the manger on his shoulder to say, "You've done well for yourself!"

Indeed the last word from the boss is so positive—we're left wondering . . . This rich man could recognize a fellow wheeler-and-dealer when he saw one—and he liked what he saw! Anyone this shrewd and clever at working the

angles was just maybe someone worth hanging onto after all!

So what is Jesus really saying to us about this Parable?

Jesus finished this little Parable and says to the disciples, “You see! There’s something here about that approach. Folks like this are far shrewder at dealing with this world than you children of light are!”

Okay—what’s the point here? Let’s rule out the obvious: Clearly the point is not that any form of stealing, cheating, swindling or dishonesty is a good thing!

Nevertheless—something about this shrewd asset-manager is being recommended—so what is it? It actually become clear when we go back to Luke 15:1-2 (The Voice Bible) which gives us the setting not just for this Parable but the three-better-known parables that make up Luke’s 15!

15 ¹Jesus became increasingly popular among *notorious sinners*—tax collectors and other social outcasts. ² The Pharisees and religious scholars noticed this.

Pharisees and Religious Scholars: This man welcomes immoral people and enjoys their company over a meal!

The larger issue and matter of importance here is **table fellowship**:

- ✓ Jesus' pattern was to hang out and eat with all the wrong kind of people in all the wrong places!
- ✓ So the Pharisees mutter and grumble!
- ✓ Jesus responds to their complaint with 3 parables on the *lost and found!*
 - Luke 15:1-7: Parable of the Lost Sheep
 - Luke 15:8-10: Parable of the Lost Coin
 - Luke 15:11-32: Parable of the Lost Prodigal Son

The point for all three parables is the same: the amount of rejoicing that comes when lost objects are found makes it worthwhile to pay any price both to search for that lost thing or person and to then put on the fatted calf to celebrate once the search is successful!

The Parable of the prodigal son ends with a party—**so now we come to today's lesson—Chapter 16:** We still hear the happy buzz of the party chatter and talk, the clink of silverware on the chinaware and dishes and joyous music echoing in the air! Luke 15 ended with a vision of GOD's Kingdom. It's a picture of such fervent joy that we should want to capture some of that joy ourselves. Jesus on the other hand sees even the Pharisees as potential sources for heavenly delight! Jesus sees them as valuable lost objects—the re-finding of which would bring joy! So Jesus suggests we enjoy their company now in the hopes that we might enjoy one another's company forever and ever as well!

So—that line of thought is hanging in the air as Chapter 16 opens: So what is it about the shrewd and clever

asset manager's attitude that Jesus finds useful for the children of light?

It is this—sisters and brothers—Jesus gave thought to the future and shaped his actions in the present. Further, Jesus knew that for now monetary resources are one way to secure the kind of future vision we all work for ourselves.

So even though in this case it meant being devious, tricky, crafty—the asset-manager's desperate desire to see his future materialize helped him to conclude that it would be worth it to take the risks he did in currying favor and *make nice* with his boss's clients!

This may be the point for us: **The church likewise has a strong vision for the future (that's what next Sunday's joint worship service is about!) called the Kingdom of GOD. What's more—that future vision should include the potential joy that will rock the cosmos in celebration when more—and not fewer—people end up attending GOD's big party!**

That vision of the future should influence us mightily in also the present moment!

So—if we have resources by which we can reach out to the lost of our family, our neighborhoods and the world—we need to do everything we can to take risks necessary to be with those folks—yes, the very folks whom also yet today we typically don't invite over for dim sum or dinner.

Yet—the Parable reminds us of **whom** we must reach out to! And since not much happens in our world today without the help of money—**then use it—Jesus says—for GOD’s good purposes and glory!** We cannot serve both GOD and the almighty dollar—Jesus tells us—but we can serve GOD by **using** the almighty dollar to reach out to others!

So why did Jesus really tell this Parable?

- ✓ Maybe this act of irony that pulls the rug out from our feet even as it makes Jesus’ larger point over and over again! Because—what are we doing when we pull up our noses at this shrewd asset-manger?
- ✓ Yes—there are some greasy people around that we believers have no business to be around them! Shouldn’t we only hang out with our “kind of people”?

Doing the Word

So sisters and brothers, what is the Word of God for us?

1. ONE: WE NEED TO BE 21st CENTURY CHRISTIANS!

Today’s Parable of the Dishonest Steward—asset manager is a tough one in understanding what Jesus was teaching.

- ✓ Can we Christians be **crafty** and **shrewd** for Jesus?
- ✓ Can we Christians use sharp and skillful strategies to promote the Gospel?
- ✓ We do need to be wise in the ways of the world, using the wisdom and technologies of the world to

promote the good news of Christ's transformational presence to our family, our neighbors to those whom the Spirit brings across our paths!

- ✓ We the Church need to be 21st century people and church—using the best practical wisdom of our time—to affirm the everlasting wisdom of our ever-emerging GOD!

2.TWO: LET'S RETHINK HOW WE DO THINGS AND HOW WE TREAT PEOPLE AROUND OUR CHURCH!

So why is the dishonest asset-manager shrewd? Even though he is still a sinner who looks out for his own interests (6:32-34), **he models behavior the disciples can emulate and follow. Instead of simply being a victim of circumstance—he transforms a bad situation into one that benefits him and others. By reducing other people's debts—he created a new set of relationships based not on the vertical relationship between lenders and debtors but on something more like the reciprocal and egalitarian, classless and open relationship of friends!**

Let's see people around us and "those who are not our kind of people" through Jesus' eyes! Jesus sees these-folks-who-are-not-our-kind-of people as valuable lost people—and re-finding them would bring great joy!

So Jesus suggests to us that we enjoy their company now in the hopes that we might enjoy one another's company forever and ever as well!

3. THREE: LET US HERE AT TFCCCH REACH OUT TO THE LOST OF OUR NEIGHBORHOODS AND WORLD!

- ✓ So if we have the financial resources—then let's use our financial resources to reach out to the folks!
- ✓ The Bible reminds us here that we cannot serve both GOD and the almighty dollar!
- ✓ Jesus does teach us here that we can serve GOD by *using* the almighty dollar to reach out to others!
- ✓ The Kingdom of God requires and leads us to give up all other commitments—including the commitment to economic security. Luke is teaching us about a different way of using wealth! Our wealth belongs to GOD and is to be used for the purposes of GOD's reign among us and not simply for our own interests.
- ✓ Are we listening?

Sent in the Word – Story of 3 Marbles

During the waning years of the depression in a small southeastern Idaho community, I used to stop by Mr. Miller's roadside stand for farm-fresh produce as the season made it available. Food and money were still extremely scarce and bartering was used, extensively. One particular day Mr. Miller was bagging some early potatoes for me. I noticed a small boy, delicate of bone and feature, ragged but clean, hungrily appraising a

basket of freshly picked green peas. I paid for my potatoes but was also drawn to the display of fresh green peas. I am a pushover for creamed peas and new potatoes. Pondering the peas, I couldn't help overhearing the conversation between Mr. Miller and the ragged boy next to me.

"Hello Barry, how are you today?"

"Hello, Mr. Miller. Fine, thank 'ya. Jus' admiring' them peas ...sure look good."

"They are good, Barry. How's your Ma?"

"Fine. Getting' stronger alla' time."

"Good. Anything I can help you with?" "No, Sir. Jus' admiring' them peas."

"Would you like to take some home?"

"No, Sir. Got nothing' to pay for 'em with."

"Well, what have you to trade me for some of those peas?"

"All I got's my prize marble here."

Is that right? Let me see it."

"Here 'tis. She's a dandy."

"I can see that. Hmmmm, only thing is this one is blue and I sort of go for red. Do you have a red one like this at home?"

"Not 'exzackley but, almost."

"Tell you what. Take this sack of peas home with you and next trip this way let me look at that red marble."

"Sure will. Thanks, Mr. Miller."

Mrs. Miller, who had been standing nearby, came over to help me. With a smile she said: "There are two other boys like him in our community, all three are in very poor circumstances. Jim just loves to bargain with them for peas, apples, tomatoes or whatever. When they come back with their red marbles, and they always do, he decides he doesn't like red after all and he sends them home with a bag of produce for a green marble or an orange one, perhaps."

I left the stand, smiling to myself, impressed with this man. A short time later I moved to Colorado but I never forgot the story of this man, the boys and their bartering. Several years went by each more rapid than the previous one. Just recently I had occasion to visit some old friends in that Idaho community and while I was there learned that Mr. Miller had died. They were having his viewing that evening and knowing my friends wanted to go, I agreed to accompany them. Upon our arrival at the mortuary we fell into line to meet the relatives of the deceased and to offer whatever words of comfort we could.

Ahead of us in line were three young men. One was in an army uniform and the other two wore nice haircuts, dark suits and white shirts ... very professional looking. They approached Mrs. Miller, standing smiling and composed, by her husband's casket. Each of the young men hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, spoke briefly with her and moved on to the casket. Her misty light blue eyes followed them as, one by one, each young man stopped briefly and placed his own warm hand over the cold pale hand in the casket. Each left the mortuary, awkwardly,

wiping his eyes.

Our turn came to meet Mrs. Miller. I told her who I was and mentioned the story she had told me about the marbles. Eyes glistening she took my hand and led me to the casket. "Those three young men, who just left, were the boys I told you about. They just told me how they appreciated the things Jim "traded" them. Now, at last, when Jim could not change his mind about color or size... they came to pay their debt. "We've never had a great deal of the wealth of this world," she confided, "but, right now, Jim would consider himself the richest man in Idaho."

With loving gentleness she lifted the lifeless fingers of her deceased husband. Resting underneath were three, magnificently shiny, red marbles.

Moral: We will not be remembered by our words -- but by our deeds. Life is not measured by the breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath, as we help others.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND
WHY JESUS *LIKES*
THIS GUY.
HE'S A *CROOK!*



WWW.AGNUSDAY.ORG

SOME SCHOLARS* BELIEVE
HE WAS ACTUALLY CUTTING
OUT HIS OWN PROFIT FOR
THE SAKE OF HIS
RELATIONSHIPS.



*THX FITZMYER!

HUH! AND I THOUGHT
THE BIBLE SAID
"MONEY CAN'T BUY ME LOVE."

(
UHH... THAT'S
LENNON/M^CCARTNEY.)



LUKE 16:1-13

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