

## What's in Your Wallet?

Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher, September 22, 2019

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church Luke 16:1-13

Ok we are going deep today. This scripture on the surface goes against anything we think about Jesus and his teachings. The principle character is a dishonest, shrewd; manager who cares about saving himself. In Philippians Paul says, “whatever is honest, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is commendable... think about these things. (Philippians 4:8) Obviously, the manager in Jesus’ parable did not get that memo! A difficult reading from:

### **Luke 16:1-13**

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. <sup>2</sup>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.’ <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’ <sup>5</sup>So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ <sup>6</sup>He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ <sup>7</sup>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.’<sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>“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. <sup>11</sup>If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? <sup>12</sup>And if you have not been

faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? <sup>13</sup>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.

This is the word of the Lord.

Even the best known and most loved parables have the power to hit us between the eyes and shake us to the very core. Jesus' words even though were spoken two thousand years ago have the ability to change the most entrenched convictions today. We use parables to reflect on us and remind us what it means to claim that we follow the Risen Christ.

Today in Luke this particular parable is not your typical Sunday School fare. This parable belongs in the advanced course. There is the rich man and his manager, nothing odd yet. The manager is not doing a good job so the rich man is firing him. The manager gets wind of this and panics. How can he support himself if the boss fires him? He is not cut out for hard labor and begging is beneath him. Not to worry, he comes up with a plan. On his own, he will ingratiate himself with the people who owe his boss by creating HUGE discounts so that when he is let go, there will be people who owe him. He will be covered.

This is not charity for the rich man's strapped clients; this is not taking the moral high ground. The manager is taking a chapter out of the Roman play book. Using the rich man's clients, he is incurring favors so that there will be payback and he will have his security. He cuts the debts that is owed to his master, so he continues to cheat his master for his own gain. There is a twist, and there is always a twist in Jesus' parables. The master is not angry but appreciates what the manager is doing and thinks that he is acting shrewdly. (that's a compliment!) Instead of losing his job, the manager is commended.

The disreputable manager tries to save himself, uses his master and ends up the winner. There is no divine justice here. The scheme is all too familiar and is met with a shrug as the way the world works sometimes. Jesus, what are you going to do with this one?

There is nothing new about this story. There is nothing new with people who are out to save themselves and will do anything to survive. For ages, people put themselves before others in order to get ahead. Just look at the story of the first children, Cain and Abel. However, Jesus uses the ways of humans to emphasize what is more important. Is this manager insuring his eternal home? He is garnering favor from mortals and they cannot guarantee a lasting peace.

Money and commodities speak. The manager used his boss's business to get what he wants, security. Friendships are solidified by the exchange of favors. Jesus knows this so he tells the people that sure this way of gaining favor works...until the money is gone, until the goods are used up. Then what are you going to do?

Jesus offers an alternative. A connection that lasts and a place that does not go away. There is a difference in operating in the ways of the world and living as children of light. Jesus drives it home by saying you cannot serve both.

I dare say we are not naive enough to think that everyone we meet is thinking about our neighbor. I dare say we have all run into people like the disreputable manager who is out to save himself and himself alone. In addition, I dare say we have done that at some time or another. As we claim to follow Jesus, we take on the mantle that we are children not solely of our time but that we are part of a greater family, the family of God that shines in a dark and cynical world. Jesus knows the extraordinary potential of humanity and Jesus is aware of the dark maneuverings of the world. We hold both potentials within us.

How does the world know us? What do our actions indicate as to where our priorities lay? To quote an overused credit card commercial, imagine me as Morgan Freeman looking directly at you and saying, "What's in your wallet?" What are the forces that drive you in the choices you make? Is it following the

ways of our age or is it striving to be a child of light? As we make that choice, can others tell by the way we live and the way we spend our money the way we divide our time and place our energies with whom do we place our trust?

There is a way of looking at things and a way of approaching life that clearly shows our point of reference. We can be like the manager who gets away with as little effort as possible; the manager who wants to come out as the winner even at the expense of others; the manager who will do anything to avoid taking responsibility for his own choices.

This parable reminds us that sometime the unscrupulous wins, if we are playing by the rewards of our time. That is what makes this parable so untidy. Not only is the disreputable manager the starring role of the parable. There is no hint of judgment or condemnation. No one is trying to fix the culture that honors such shrewdness. The manager is commended and we assume both the rich man and his manager will continue the same practices. They seem to be successful!

Who does not want to outsmart our competitor; who does not want to insure a good life? We can go for the immediate gratification; we forget how fleeting the way of the world truly is or we can take the comprehensive view. We need to do a value check and determine what guides us. One way to do so is to look at our wallets. We carry our wallets most of the time. What do we hold in there that is so important to us? Do our wallets show the compass by which we are guided?

We have real choices to make and we make them repeatedly. Sometimes we fall into the way of the road more travelled. Sometimes we go with the crowd and do not make a difference. In this parable Jesus is saying there is a difference between the world where we live and the desire of who we strive to be. We live in a world in which self-preservation is honored, but that does not have to be the path we take. As followers of Christ we need to know the difference

Last March Gregg and I moved to St Paul. As you know when you move, things are stirred up. However, it is interesting the things we needed to change and what our priorities were. You can tell that by looking in my wallet. The first

three things we did have after we moved--was a new library card, a new bankcard and a voter's registration card. It is a combination of the ways of the world and the things that are important for us to acquire. Also, in my wallet is a card a get each year from the Presbytery of Twin Cities Area, saying that I am a member in good standing. I wish Oak Grove gave out membership cards so that every time we open our wallet and look at our bank card or use our driver's license to say who we are and where you live, that you had a card to remind you to whom you belong. You are not only a member of this church but you are a member of the children of light. That is very different that being a child of our times. A card would be a reminder that in every transaction we did, we would know that we are a follower of Christ who knows the difference of acting only for ourselves and living a life with others.

As we look at our wallet, we see what we hold so dear. We are the managers of great treasures, not only our material wealth but also treasures of the knowledge of God's love. As managers it is up to us what we do with our wealth, our resources, our land and all that has been entrusted to us. That is what stewardship is about.

The disreputable manager was held over the abyss ready to be let go and he pulled a temporary fix it out of the hat. What lessons did he learn? To be shrewd and more self-centered than before? Thankfully, we have been shown a better way. Thanks be to God Amen.