

Proper 20C 2019 SSP

St. Luke 16:1-13

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Today we have a story told by Jesus about two worldly characters, a rich man and his financial manager or steward, followed by sayings about how Jesus's disciples are to regard and to use money. Let's start with the story.

A rich man discovers his steward has been mismanaging his accounts with his debtors to the steward's advantage. He calls the steward onto the carpet, demands a full disclosure, and says the steward is going to be fired.

So the steward goes around to the debtors, asks them what they owe his master, and reduces their bills which probably included high interest for the steward. He knows the debtors will be grateful to him. In fact, he has done this, because he is not strong enough to dig ditches and is ashamed to go begging, and he hopes his maneuver will ingratiate him to the debtors so that they may receive him into their houses, perhaps as manager.

Upon seeing this, the steward's offended master commends the worldly shrewdness and prudence of the manager.

It seems that Jesus, our master, is himself commending this hustling by the dishonest steward, because, as he says, the children of this world are better at this sort of thing than are the children of light. And then, says Jesus, follow the dishonest steward's example of hustle in a crisis, using the "mammon of unrighteousness" for the purposes of the Kingdom of God. Just as the dishonest steward would be received into those worldly households for his hustle, so the children of the Kingdom will be received into heavenly mansions by their use of the world's money.

Just as the dishonest steward faced an employment crisis, so also the disciples of Jesus have a crisis of their own; namely, time is short and eternity is long and the Kingdom of God is daily at hand. Walk while you have the light; night comes, when no one can work.

Jesus is not commending the dishonesty of the steward in his story. He is using the alacrity of the steward's response to his crisis as an example for us. He is telling us to hop to it for the Kingdom of God. And hopping to it certainly includes our use of our money, right now, for we know neither the day nor the hour of the Lord's visitation.

You cannot serve God and mammon, says Jesus. Money is certainly one of the gods of this world. And yet Jesus talks a great deal about money, that is, about our relationship with money. When money is used to promote the purposes of the Kingdom, it is in the service of God and indicates what lies at the heart of one's life; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

As I believe most of you know, Saint Stephen's is embarking on the first stages of a search for a new Rector. We also are beginning the pledge campaign for Saint Stephen's. This past year, we had 66 pledging units (either individuals or couples or families) pledging a total of \$104,000. My arithmetic says that amount divided by 66 is about \$1,578. That's a bit over \$30 per week. That's a start, but I need to tell you something. When I was rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Rosemont PA, we had no endowment and had to rely on what the people gave. They were not dissimilar to the people here in economic background. The parish was similar. One of Saint Stephen's rectors, Fr Charles Townsend, came here from Good Shepherd and retired here after 15 years in 1945. I was rector at Good Shepherd between 1978 and 1985. One year, when I divided the number of pledging units at Good Shepherd into the total of what they pledged, the same kind of math I just did for us here, I came up with \$2,500. That was over

three decades ago. So dearly beloved I think we can do better here, and there never was a more urgent time to try. The manager in Jesus's story had a crisis to deal with. We have one of our own here. We cannot rely on Saint Stephen's endowment, the money that comes from the donors of the past, to do the work for us. In fact, we need to reduce our reliance on it and be careful stewards of it. We need to hop to it ourselves.

One of the first things I decided to do here was to return to God, through a pledge to Saint Stephen's, a tenth of what you pay me to be your Interim Priest. A tenth is a tithe. The point is not 10 percent. That is not a mandate by Jesus, although the Episcopal Church embraced the principle for sacrificial pledging some decades ago. But let me challenge us all as we consider and pray. If we were to raise our average pledge by \$1,000, with just the 66 pledging units we had last year, we would lift the pledge total from \$104,000 to \$170,000. And of course we need more pledgers than we have now. What an enormous encouragement that would be for everyone, including prospective priest-candidates for Rector.

I'll leave you with that thought. More next week when we celebrate Saint Michael and All Angels. Join me in hopping to it for Saint Stephen's.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.