

## 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Stewardship runs through today's readings. How we manage our time, talents, gifts, and service matters, for all that we have and enjoy in this life are gifts. Our Gospel reading from Luke today shows us what true sharing and stewardship really is...when we have nothing, that's the hardest time to truly share with others.

Jesus taught us "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Luke 16:1-13

### The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

**16** Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. <sup>2</sup> So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

<sup>3</sup> "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg— <sup>4</sup> I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

<sup>5</sup> "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

<sup>6</sup> "'Nine hundred gallons<sup>[a]</sup> of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.'

<sup>7</sup> "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

"'A thousand bushels<sup>[b]</sup> of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

<sup>8</sup> "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. <sup>9</sup> I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

<sup>10</sup> "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest

with much. <sup>11</sup> So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

<sup>13</sup> "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

.....THE WORD OF GOD

Before John Wesley became the founder of the Methodist Church he was a teacher at Oxford University back in the 1700's. When he began his career, he was paid 30 pounds per year - in those days a lot of money. His living expenses were 28 pounds - so he gave 2 pounds away.

The next year his income doubled - but he still managed to live on 28 pounds - so he gave away 32 pounds. The third year he earned 90 pounds - lived on 28 - and gave away 62. The fourth year he earned 120 pounds - lived on 28 - and gave away 92. One year his income was a little over 1,400 pounds - he lived on 30 and gave away nearly all of the 1,400 pounds. Wesley felt that with increasing income, what should rise is not the Christian's standard of living but the standard of giving. Increasing our standard of giving. What a great Christian man and what a great lesson he taught us. It is the same lesson found in the parable for today.

The reading recounts Jesus' Parable of the Shrewd Manager, also known as the Parable of the Unjust Steward. In it, a manager is caught wasting his master's possessions and, facing dismissal, reduces the debts of his master's debtors to gain their favor. Jesus then uses this story to teach his disciples to be wise in their stewardship of wealth, be faithful with what is entrusted to them, and to recognize that they cannot serve both God and money. The Pharisees are standing off to the side watching Jesus as was their custom. Jesus' disciples are listening intently as he tells his story. Probably on this occasion there were more than just the 12. A large number of followers are gathered around. He tells them about a steward who handled the business affairs of a wealthy man. But the steward has squandered his master's money; he was reckless and wasteful. This parable tells us that the key to security about the things we need is not anxious earning and saving, but trustworthy service and

spending. If God can trust us to spend our money to meet the needs of others, then the money we ourselves need will also be provided. The parable can be broken down into two parts: the parable and then the application. The first part identifies that Jesus is speaking to His disciples. The parable begins with a rich man calling his steward before him to inform him that he will be relieving him of his duties for mismanaging his master's resources. A steward is a person who manages the resources of another. The steward had authority over all of the master's resources and could transact business in his name. This requires the utmost level of trust in the steward. The reckless young man does not come to his senses in time and he starts realizing that he will soon be without a job, so he makes some shrewd deals behind his master's back. He does something shrewd and so conniving. As he is cleaning out his desk and clearing out his things he calls in his master's debtors, those who had outstanding accounts, and he cuts those debts in half. You owe 800 gallons of olive oil? Write me a check for 400 and we will call it even. You owe a thousand bushels of wheat? Write me a check for 800 and we'll call it even. He forgives the debts that are not his to forgive, and he gains friends in the process. Strangely, as a result, his master commends him. When the master becomes aware of what the wicked servant had done, he commends him for his shrewdness.

The lesson Jesus teaches in Luke 16 at first seems confusing. Why is he praising the unlawful manager? He actually isn't. He's telling us that if we get in the habit of doing good things either out of habit, strategy, or restitution, they may lead us into doing them for the right reasons. In Jesus' parable story as usual, a rich man, always a metaphor for God in Jesus' stories, had a manager that would be us - God's stewards.

In His application of the story in the remaining verses, Jesus begins by saying, "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. In our reading today, we can get the message that we are to be motivated to share our resources by anticipation as well as memory. When we share in the Lord's Supper, we anticipate and receive the gift that Jesus left for us. Bread and Juice or wine.. so simple but what a great and tremendous gift. That's the way we should always feel about God's love and grace - We have been given it and told to share at least the half of it with others. The world is not changed, but we see it and ourselves in a new light when we share with others.