



Sermon for Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost. Sept. 18, 2022 – Who do You Serve?

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene
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[Jeremiah 8:18-9:1, Psalm 79:1-9, 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Luke 16:1-13](#)

Lord, in our busy and materialistic world, help us to learn how to be satisfied with what we have and generous in giving to those in need. Amen.

Jesus talks a lot about money, but the parable in today's Gospel reading is only found in Luke, and what Jesus says seems out of character to me. "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." What? To be fair, accounting has never made sense to me, and I find this parable pretty dense, too. Let's take it apart and try to understand it in our own context.

A wealthy Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is told that the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of his company is embezzling and cooking the books to conceal the theft. He confronts the CFO, tells him that he is fired, and calls for a financial audit. The CFO panics. He knows that he is guilty as sin. Managing money is all he knows how to do. He is too wimpy for a manual labor job and he would never beg.

Then the desperate CFO has a brilliant idea. He will contact each of his boss' debtors and make the credits match the debits by subtracting from each bill the amount he had overcharged them (and kept for himself), and by having them write a revised IOU. If you are wondering, as I did, why one debt was reduced 50% and another only 25%, that is the joy of commodity pricing in a barter economy. In the currency of the time, each reduction would have been approximately 500 denarii [which was ~500 days wages for a laborer].

The CFO is still fired, but his boss' debtors feel as though they have gotten a deal. The CFO is anticipating that perhaps one day they will return the favor. Nowhere in the parable does it say the CFO returned the money he stole. BUT – the CEO commends the CFO for being shrewd, because the debtors (who apparently never knew they were being 'robbed' in the first place) now have a friendlier relationship with the company.

Jesus does not condemn the dishonest money manager, nor does Jesus suggest we should copy that behavior. The CFO did the 'right' thing; correcting the amount that was owed by the company's debtors, but he did it for the 'wrong' reason; so that they might reciprocate when he needed a favor (i.e.; once his ill-gotten gains were depleted).

Please note that the Bible does not say money is evil, but that the LOVE of money is the root of all evil¹. It's not only about money. It is about anything that we put above God. Anything that we put ahead of God is an idol. "Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the

¹ 1 Timothy 6:10

first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.²” My Army brat upbringing taught me the hierarchy: God, Country, Family, and way at the bottom, Self. Money didn’t even make that list.

Doing research for this sermon, I learned that during his Christian conversion period, Bob Dylan released two Gospel albums: ***Slow Train Coming*** and ***Saved***. On ***Slow Train Coming***, the chorus of the song “*Gotta Serve Somebody*” alludes to Jesus’ sentiments in the final sentence of verse 13, “You cannot serve God and wealth.”

But you're gonna have to serve somebody
Yes indeed, you're gonna have to serve somebody
Well it may be the Devil
Or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”³ Who (or what) do you serve? What do you value? How will you use your resources to love your neighbor?

“Now to the One who by the power at work within **us** is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.”⁴ Amen.

² Holy Eucharist Rite I in the Book of Common Prayer, pg. 324

³ Joshua 24:15

⁴ Ephesians 3:20-21