

"We merit nothing, but have received everything" Luke 16: 1-9 Trinity 9

Grace and peace in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Many of the parables of Jesus are not like Aesop's fables. They are not intended to give examples of right conduct, but to help better understand God's grace and our response to it.

According to this parable of the unjust steward, there was a rich man who did not attend to his own office work and finances, leaving all this to an administrator who was put in full charge. But the steward was accused of mismanaging the property entrusted to his care, and squandering his master's money, whether due to embezzlement or extravagant living. The accuracy of the accusation caused the master to assume that the charge was true, so he called the steward before him. He wanted him to give an account of himself and his work: What is this I hear about you? He was ordered to produce the books, and give a detailed account of his administration before being fired. Because if the books showed a discrepancy between income and debts that were due in the past, the money would have to be paid back and the loss of the steward's position would follow. There was still a chance for the steward if he could present evidence of his innocence.

The steward was in a dilemma, racking his brains for some way out of the difficulty. Dismissal under the circumstances would be a disgrace; no other employer would give him a clerical position. He must

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be content, if he were to find work at all, with a low-paying job with little responsibility involved. His thoughts turned to agriculture, since his work had put him in contact with farmers; but he was not physically not strong enough to dig, he could never stand that. The alternative seems to be begging, and that would make him ashamed.

But finally he hit upon a plan that might work. Through it he expected, even then, however, either to avoid dismissal or, if that should not succeed in doing so, to provide for himself a comfortable old age. If he lost his position and was disgraced, the people he had in mind would be under an obligation to take him into their homes. He carried out his plan while running out of time. One after another of his master's debtors was called to the office. Since he still had charge of the whole operation, he could easily do this. These borrowers might have been farmers, who paid their rents in kind, or people who had managed the supply of goods in the shops of the master.

In each case, as he spoke to the individual debtor, he followed the same plan, although only two examples are given. In each interview, they changed or rewrote bills of debt, leaving a smaller amount than was stipulated or due to the owner. A man owed him a hundred measures, some seven hundred and fifty gallons, of oil. The amount was changed to read only half as much. Another owed a hundred

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measures, between seven and eight hundred bushels, of wheat. The amount was reduced to eighty. The object of the steward was to meet any contingency.

If this scheme was successful, the imbalance would no longer exist, for the entries would appear to have been much smaller than the master thought. Even if the plan was discovered, the bills of debt would be legally sound, and debtors would show their gratitude by offering him refuge. It has even been suggested that the steward had falsified the amounts in the accounts of the original debt and pocketed the surplus, and was now returning to the original correct figures. In any case, it was a smart plan. Even the master, when he received information concerning this last trick of the steward, could not refrain from some praise. He praised the steward, not because of his infidelity and fraud, but because of his intelligence in managing the situation and extricating himself from an unpleasant position.

The application of the parable: The children of this world are wiser than the children of light, believers who have been enlightened by the Spirit of God, in their generation, to their own nature; they exhibit more alertness and entrepreneurship in their concerns than the children of the Church in theirs. They show wisdom with regard to the men of their own kind and with reference to worldly affairs. Christians

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should show the same zeal, the same enthusiasm, the same business acumen in the affairs of the kingdom of God. Christians must use their money in the interest of the kingdom of God, in the establishment and expansion of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

We must also understand that if the children of this world can show mercy based on self-interest, how much more should we not show mercy to others for the love of God? We pray in the Our Father, forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. We do not deserve anything good from God, just punishment for our sins. However, the Lord has forgiven all our debts because of the blood of Jesus. We respond to the great love of God in this way: We show mercy and love to others. Not to avoid punishment, because we have avoided that in Christ. On the contrary, because the grace of God surpasses all our understanding.

Therefore, we have the peace that passes all understanding also.
Amen.