

This Sunday we are going to meditate in the Gospel lesson of today: Luke 16 1-15.

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together”. Amen

Dear fellow redeemed:

Most likely every one of us have had our mothers teach this age old proverb -- "**If you cannot say something nice about someone then ....do not say anything at all.**" I doubt there has ever been a mother or father that has not said this a thousand times to their children. The eighth commandment, which reminds us that we are not to bear false witness also asks us to put the best construction on everything we say, looking for the best in the people around us.

One young man, reminded by his grandmother of this basic rule, that if you cannot say something nice, then do not say anything, asked her, “Can you say anything nice about the devil? “Yes”, his grandmother replied, “You can say: he is a good bad example.” But it almost seems as if Jesus is taking this idea of saying something nice about someone too far in our text today. Here we have a steward, a business manager entrusted with the owner's financial affairs, who is accused of wrongdoing, and who seems to deserve the charges against him—at least as we see him dealing with the people who owe money to his master.

Jesus calls the man a dishonest steward—and yet, He seems to be holding him up as an example for us! Surely Jesus cannot want us to be like this dishonest manager, can He? He does not want us to get involved in shady business deals or to cheat our employers out of their income, for the sake of personal gain, or even to help the small business man who is trying to get ahead, but who finds himself at the mercy of some powerful corporation?

Jesus does not want us to be dishonest like this dishonest manager. What He does want us to do is to make the best use of the resources and blessings that God has entrusted to us, including our money.

If the people of this world, who are so obsessed with having the things of this world, know how to make good use of the resources around them, for their own ends, then surely we, who know that all that we have is entrusted to us from God, should have the wisdom and ability to use God's resources to accomplish His purposes, which include caring for ourselves and our family, but which also involve serving others, as we use every means at our disposal to make friends for heaven.

This parable is one of the harder sayings of Scripture, and surely one of the strangest lessons in service. The parable itself leads up to the last part, where Jesus says: **No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**” The question that is raised here is, how do we use the resources that God has given to us to serve Him? What is the right way of using our earthly possessions?

The business manager in our text has been doing the wrong things with the owner resources. The man is accused of being careless and wasteful with the master's resources. This is unacceptable to the owner, who fires the man. Now, in desperation, the manager devises an ingenious plan: he will endear himself to the owner's debtors. One by one, he calls them in and offers them an opportunity to reduce their debts. And when the owner hears about it, he commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.

Now Jesus holds this man before us and says: **the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.** This is why this parable is such a strange story of service.

When Jesus says “**people of the light**”, He is talking about us: believers in Him. So we know that Jesus would never want us to be unscrupulous in our business dealings; if anything, we are commanded to treat everyone with integrity and honesty. So what is it that he wants us to learn from this man? What can we learn from a crook that will help us to live the holy lives God expects of His people?

The lesson we need to learn begins with the fact that God has given us all the task of being stewards of all of His possessions. **The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;** says Scriptures. But God has given us the responsibility of managing all that belongs to Him.

This applies to our time, our abilities, and in this parable, we are especially mindful of the fact that it applies to our money. Now the steward in the text knew how to use money to his advantage. He may have been a shady dealer, but at least he knew money was a tool that could do great things, if used properly. And that is something God would have us learn, too.

Money is a tool that can be used to do great things—if we know how to use it wisely. And God wants us to use money—the money He has first provided—to the best possible advantage. In part, that means that we have to use the resources at our command to plan for the future, through savings and investments. It means that we have an obligation to use our resources for the proper care and support of our family. But all too often we want to stop there. We want to have it, to accumulate it, to feel confident in our wealth. The danger, of course, is that money can become our God, and that we start to serve money, rather than using money as a tool to do all that God has entrusted to us.

We are to make good use of the worldly wealth God has given to us. It is important to note that God has never commanded his people to be poor. He never said that it is wrong for Christians to have money and possessions. He does tell us that there can be danger in these things, when we are caught up in them and forget the God to whom all things truly belong. But our possessions can be a wonderful thing when they are used to serve the Lord. And I will say it again: God expects that we will use our money to care for our family and to plan for our future.

But He also tells us to use worldly wealth to prepare for the greater future, namely, for the life we will have in heaven. We can do great things in the church with our wealth. We can support mission projects overseas. We can give to mission congregations here in Canada, we can buy items for the food bank to feed those who are in need, to mention some. We can use our worldly wealth to gain friends who will welcome them for eternity.

This kind of service, of using our wealth in a positive way can only flow out of the life we have as the redeemed people of God. Those who do not know the power of forgiveness, who do not understand or appreciate the real treasure that is ours through the Saviour who gave His life for us on the cross; the Saviour who lives to give us the fullness of life with Him, these are the people who, like that dishonest steward, will serve money and use it to their own ends.

But we serve the Lord. We know what has real and lasting value. It is not the things of this world, because sooner or later they all fade away. Money has no lasting value. But what we do with it—through our offerings, through our gifts of charity, through our care and concern for the needs of others—this will endure forever and ever. When we use our money in a God-pleasing way, we are going to hear Him say to us those blessed words: Well done, My good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master.

Let us not forget that God gives us what we have to use for our good and for the good of others. God does not demand that we abstain from money or from earning it or to give what we do not have. What He does ask us, if we have it, is to use it wisely and prudently, to accomplish great things. When money is a tool, and not an idol, we find we can do great things through it. But money is not the only blessing God gives us. We are all special creations of God. We have skills, talents, and abilities. Some are energetic, some patient listeners, some artistic, some organized. Some people have lots of time on their hands. Others have been through loss and hardship, and can help another person through grief and sorrow.

Whatever we are, whatever gifts God has given us, Jesus asks that we be shrewd with these gifts so that benefit goes to the kingdom of grace. That is what making friends with the world is about. Friends bring joy into our lives, and there is great joy to be found in using what we have to serve the Lord. The problem is, we see giving to God as something that hurts, rather than something that feels good. Our lives are crowded with demands. So many bills to pay. So little time left for ourselves. How can adding something else feel good?

Giving does feel good. It feels good because when we are giving to God we begin to realize how much God has given to us. You see, faithful stewardship pays—not in the sense that it earns our salvation, because God has already accomplished that through the cross of Christ. But it pays a dividend, as God blesses the humble service that flows from loving, thankful and faithful stewards, stewards who use what God has entrusted to them in the way God would have us use them: to accomplish His gracious purposes for us and for those around us. Amen

“The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour”. Amen