

Luke 16

The Dishonest Steward

Amos, 1 Timothy

I don't understand this gospel story today known as the Dishonest Steward. Just so we are clear about that from the very beginning.

However, we all understand a world where someone feathers their own nest without regard to others. That would be the dishonest steward – the man who stands between the wealthy and the poor.

I think that we middle class folks tend to define the wealthy as anyone who has more than we do, who has more than they need and who won't miss a little bit if it disappears. We are suspicious of great wealth: where it comes from, what one had to do to obtain it. We are suspicious that some cheating has been involved – the very kind of thing that the prophet Amos is railing against where the prices go up as the size of the 'pound of coffee' goes down.

There is a general attitude that the wealthy didn't have to put in the blood, sweat and tears that we have. Most of us are aware of the imbalance between the workers in the factories and the owners who collect the profits.

On the other hand, we aren't very gracious to the poor who we tend to think of as morally lax, too lazy to do the hard work to 'make it' and spending their money on frivolous, non-essentials – which are often the same things which we already own and feel entitled to because we aren't poor.

So our thinking about money is all over the place. We talk about what is owed, what is earned, about what is fair... because life is hard and requires a lifetime of hard work for most of us. All of us have had to make choices and do without, and the future could bring financial disaster on us in too many ways.

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Our story has 3 players: the wealthy guy of whom we are both suspicious and envious. The manager of his estate, also known as a steward, who appears to be a bit of a crook, and who is untrustworthy and dishonest. And then there are the poor debtors who needed a loan for a car, or college or a medical bill or to support their business. They get a break, an easing of their debt load.

But in the end everyone is without our sympathy. The wealthy can weather this loss, the dishonest steward is shrewd but we don't trust him and the poor debtors are getting windfall they didn't work for and few are happy about that.

Now none of this is brilliant on my part – it just reflects the world as I see it and some attitudes of which I have been guilty. So, in good Lutheran practice, we have begun our discussion with confession: the truth is we have a tendency to be non-gracious misers.

The next important question we might ask is Where is God in all this?

Is God among the poor who are being crushed by an economic system that buries them in endless debt ridden labor from which few will escape? Ever wonder why Lottery sales are so high in certain neighborhoods? All it takes is a dollar and a dream!

Or could God be the wealthy person from whom all these riches flow?

Certainly God isn't the dishonest steward? unless this is a case of God playing Robin Hood and taking from the rich to give to the poor. ....sort of gaming the system to re-distribute wealth. \*\*\*\*

**OR** is this story about us? Are we the poor – believing and living as if there is never enough?

Or are we the wealthy – with more riches at our fingertips than we are willing to acknowledge?

OR could we be the dishonest steward? His access to wealth meant he could give loans and set the terms, too. It appears he puts his energy solely into taking care of himself. Yet he is commended for being shrewd!

This story is as complicated as our relationship with money – as people of faith. In Luke Jesus is crystal clear, money will lead us astray, and stand between us and God. It will deafen us to God's call to care for the neighbor. **It will become an idol for our worship.**

**Wealth is the great temptation that we must face down again and again,** because we know it is true: 'no one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money.'

Could this story act as a mirror to reflect back to us our practices and attitudes? Do we squander the riches that come to us from God while at the same time, judging the rest of the human family – rich, poor and dishonest alike?

Could this story be telling us: this is who you are .....desperately in need of forgiveness.....dependent on God's grace and holding tight to a dollar bill?

Once again I get to the end and am not certain. But this I know. As we follow this Jesus, we will have to be ever mindful of the power wealth has over us, and how often it stands between us and God. We will have to break open our hearts and loosen our fists so the riches of this kingdom are employed to care for our neighbors. Choices will have to be made; attitudes adjusted. As we seek God's promised forgiveness, we need to show grace and mercy to others.

So, my friends, we pray. We pray for those in power that they see money as a tool and not a weapon. We pray for Leaders at every level who must wrestle with their own desires and endure push back while they make decisions for the sake of the greater community.

As I will pray for you, I ask that you pray for me, as well.

May we all serve the God who forgives with generous hearts and steadfast wills.

Amen