

SERMON: Faithful in All Things

TEXT: Luke 16:1-13

Now, from a non fisher-person, here is a true fish story. There was an eleven-year-old boy who was fishing for sunfish and perch with his father the night before the bass opener. Tired of fishing with worms, the boy tied on a small silver lure so he could practice casting. On one of the boy's casts, something huge doubled over his pole. With help from his father, the boy brought up the largest fish he had ever seen. It was a bass. The father looked at his watch. It was just two hours until bass season opened. The boy pleaded to keep the trophy fish. "Nobody will know!" he reasoned. But his father insisted that the fish be put back into the water.

On the one hand you might be thinking, "Poor kid. Catching a fish like that doesn't happen every day. It was awfully strict of his father to be splitting hairs like that. Two hours – they were so close to the opening – what difference would two hours make?"

On the other hand – two hours or two minutes – how close or how far is not the point. The point is whether or not they were willing to break the rules when no one was looking.

These are the two ends of the spectrum: the idea that *rules were made to be broken*, and the idea that *honesty is the best policy*. Oh, and let's not forget, *it's easier to ask forgiveness than permission*. One man from the other church admitted that he would do most anything to rationalize a way to keep that fish. Of course, today the whole problem could be solved by taking a quick photo with a cell phone and then throwing the fish back in the water. However, before cell phones, what would that boy have learned from **you** that day?

This story speaks to the dilemma that honesty and integrity can cause. I think it could be argued that honesty is not always the best policy. Furthermore, today's scripture lesson from Luke,

commonly known as the Parable of the Dishonest Manager, is not that clear cut.

In fact, it's downright confusing. Even to experts and scholars who have studied the context and the setting and the original language. They have all struggled to understand the meaning.

I looked to *The Message*, a contemporary and plainspoken version of the Bible written by Eugene Peterson. Let's hear how he tells it.

Jesus said to his disciples, "There was once a rich man who had a manager. He got reports that the manager had been taking advantage of his position by running up huge personal expenses. So he called him in and said, 'What's this I hear about you? You're fired. And I want a complete audit of your books.'

"The manager said to himself, 'What am I going to do? I've lost my job as manager. I'm not strong enough for a laboring job, and I'm too proud to beg. . . . Ah, I've got a plan. Here's what I'll do . . . then when I'm turned out into the street, people will take me into their houses.'

“Then he went at it. One after another, he called in the people who were in debt to his master. He said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

“He replied, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’

“The manager said, ‘Here, take your bill, sit down here—quick now—write fifty.’

“To the next he said, ‘And you, what do you owe?’

“He answered, ‘A hundred sacks of wheat.’

“He said, ‘Take your bill, write in eighty.’

Now here’s a surprise: The master praised the crooked manager! And why? Because he knew how to look after himself. Streetwise people are smarter in this regard than law-abiding citizens. They are on constant alert, looking for angles, surviving by their wits. I want you to be smart in the same way—but for what is *right*—using every adversity to stimulate you to creative survival, to concentrate your attention on the bare essentials, so you’ll live, really live, and not complacently just get by on good behavior.”

Jesus went on to make these comments:

If you’re honest in small things,
you’ll be honest in big things;

If you’re a crook in small things,
you’ll be a crook in big things.

If you’re not honest in small jobs,
who will put you in charge of the store?

No worker can serve two bosses:

He’ll either hate the first and love the second

Or adore the first and despise the second.

You can't serve both God and the Bank.

It seems that even Jesus is applauding the creativity and shrewdness of the manager. As the New Revised Standard Version puts it, "for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. 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."

Again, even Biblical scholars after years of study have not been able to make sense of this. So, let's just move on to the remaining verses in which Jesus sums up his point: "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in very little is dishonest also in much."

I think a good litmus test for being FAITHFUL IN ALL THINGS, is to ask that once popular question known by the acronym, WWJD. "What would Jesus do?"

A number of years ago, my sister shared an article with me. The headline read, "What would Jesus *drive*?" I know it sounds silly, even bordering on ridiculous. But maybe not.

We could argue that Jesus is one with the Creator of the universe, and therefore would care about preserving it. Jesus cares about clean air and clean water. So perhaps, even in our modern and fast-paced world, Jesus might not drive at all. Jesus might ride a bicycle or take public transportation or car pool with others. It is fair to say that Jesus would be faithful to the values and priorities of his father, the Creator God. And if we are followers of Jesus, wouldn't we strive to hold the same values?

To be FAITHFUL IN ALL THINGS would include how we care for creation, how we treat one another, how we spend our money, how we spend our time. How does Jesus feel about religion? Where does Jesus stand on the war in Ukraine? What would Jesus do about immigration?

There's a show on Netflix called "Kim's Convenience," about a Korean family living in Canada. They own a convenience store and the wife and mother is a devout Christian. Occasionally her husband or her children will do something that she feels is against their religion, and she accuses them of "making baby Jesus cry." I think it's funny; and it is said that things are funny because they're true. There is certainly some truth to the idea that there are some things we do that make our Lord and Savior Jesus cry.

One commentary I read points out that the manager in the parable Jesus told is a steward. A steward is someone who is put

in charge of caring for someone else's household or property. "In Jesus' parables, stewards are expected to invest talents left in their keeping, and when they are faithful they are given even greater responsibilities." A steward was expected to be 'faithful and prudent' or *shrewd*.

At the time for the offering in a worship service, we are often reminded that everything we have is a gift from God. That makes us stewards. Nothing belongs to us. We are simply taking care of it for God.

The dishonest manager was shrewd in that he found a way for everyone to win or to end up happy. And you might say that Jesus was shrewd in sacrificing himself on the cross, winning salvation for the world.

To him we owe our commitment to be FAITHFUL IN ALL THINGS. May we fulfill it, to the glory of God!

AMEN.