

The Dishonest Money Manager—Luke 16:1-13

My own translation of one of Jesus' sayings in today's parable of the Dishonest Steward will keep coming back to the center of today's message.

That is—*“The people whose lives are focused on dealing with money—are more shrewd in dealing with their own matters than the people who are focused on soul matters.”*

Kind of a dig, huh?

But you see, Jesus often told stories that centered around MONEY!

I'm sure he knew that a major focus of people's lives is MONEY!

Lack of money!

Earning money!

Saving money!

Spending money!

Wasting money!

Poverty! Excess!

Extreme poverty! Extreme excess!

Paying bills! Delaying bills!

Dollar Bills! Twenty dollar bills!

Coins! Debit cards! Credit cards! Banks! Payday loans!

Cash back! **“What's in your wallet?”**

Losing money!

Double your money!

Borrowing money!

Having no money!

Asking for money!

Greed for money!

Investing money!

Managing money!

Stealing money!

Giving money away!

Jesus seemed to have considerable knowledge about how money was invested, earned, saved, traded, hoarded, and given away in his own time.

He is known to have paid close attention to:

- Housing loan schemes that harmed widows!
- Money and currency exchanges transacted at tables he turned over in the Jerusalem Temple!
- The investing and saving of talent and pounds
- The total commitment/giving of money by a poor widow
- Capital investments by a certain wealthy farmer
- The larger, ever timely issue of the love of money
- *“Can you love God and money at the same time?”*...Jesus didn't think so.

I think Jesus told money stories because money **is** a central focus of our lives!

Yet he was concerned that money could become **THE FOCUS** OF OUR LIVES whether we have a lot— or some—or a little—or none.

Jesus wanted to help people move money **away** from the center of their lives— and move other life purposes and meanings **toward** the center.

His ideas gave direction and guidance to people to **look** for some **balance** in their lives when it comes to dealing with money.

To struggle for some balance? When it comes to money?

It's hard to say what that balance looks like in the life of any single person— or family—or business—or church—or non profit.

But just keeping that word BALANCE in mind can be illuminating.

Where is my **balance** point when it comes to money or lack of money?

Where is our **balance** to be found in engaging with issues of money?

When faced with seemingly opposing priorities or commitments with respect to money, try praying for BALANCE between them.

You'll be surprised at how that simple prayer will work.

“God—instead of worry, panic, greed, not paying attention, not thinking, thinking too much about money—grant me BALANCE.

Remember too that Jesus said “Where your treasure goes, there will your heart go also.”

Hmmmmh....

So what we commit our money to...?

.....there we will find the meaning and value of our lives?

If we want to change the value and meaning of our lives, gradually begin to make small changes in what we do with our money.

How we earn it!

Spend it!

Borrow it!

Lend it!

Save it!

Invest it!

Waste it!

Give it away!....Is going to shape and create what means something in our lives.

So, to sum up to this point Jesus' main thoughts on money:

You cannot love God and money!

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Not the other way around.

And balance!

Jesus never actually said “balance”. I am just suggesting it as an interpretation of his general thoughts about adjusting your focus and keeping your focus when money or lack of money begins to take over your life.

But then!—Jesus went beyond all these ideas and expressed a rather startling and even controversial opinion, as we encounter his thinking in his parable of the Dishonest Steward.

I'm going to read his opinion as it was read from the pew Bible first.

“For the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.”

And then because that translation of his ancient Aramaic might be a little obscure, in its meaning, I'm going to make a stab at paraphrasing it in more contemporary language.

“The people whose lives are focused on money and finance are more shrewd in dealing with their own business than are the people of who are focused on soul matters.”.....

It's a cutting comment, really.

Jesus is saying that if people were even half as energetic, committed, and persistent in the spiritual dimension of their lives as they were in their financial affairs, the world wouldn't be in such a big mess.

And the dishonest steward parable is his way of giving an example.

It's counter-intuitive!

Jesus commends the dishonest steward, saying essentially, *“Look at this person! If you were one fourth as committed to your spiritual life as he was to his financial life, you would be in lifelong communion with God and full of love and peace within yourself.”*

“Here you are putting a lot of your finite time and finite energy into trading, spending, earning, borrowing, investing in the currency of your country, your nation”.....Your dollars, pounds, rubles, yen,

“What about putting a lot more of your finite time and finite energy into trading, spending, and earning the currency of the Kingdom of God!”

What does that look like?

Well.....

Jesus pointed to a widow who had very, very little and gave it away.

He pointed to children orphaned by wars, disease and violence.

And he pointed out ways to practice and organize non-violent responses to violence.

He pointed to birds and lilies and seeds and the basic human need for beauty.

Jesus pointed to people who are sick and without clothes.

People who were lost and needed to be found!

He pointed to people with no income! And no savings!

And people with no sanity left to save!

And what he kept getting at was:

“Let’s be as shrewd and committed and persistent in engaging with the dysfunction, the ignorance and the lack of compassion that contributes to making a messed up world.”

I want to draw to a close by applying this thought to our congregation.

I think we have been quite shrewd, persistent, gritty, faithful in our recent history when it comes to sustaining and transforming our spiritual community and life.

All you have to do is look at:

1. The successful tension filled struggle to rebuild the church after the 2011 fire and sustain the congregation during that time.
2. Sustaining and growing the Adult Sunday School classes.
3. Creating a new Sunday School for children.
4. Creating a new concert series and sustaining the music ministry and choir.
5. Starting the shower ministry.
6. Starting heART and Soul, an arts and spirituality summer day camp.
7. Starting a youth group with an original concept that has a lot of promise.

All these ministries and purposes have required as much persistence, shrewdness, and dedication as it takes to run any sort of business or financial institution.

But a new challenge remains—the creation of a Young Adult Ministry and Programming to partner with and connect to young adults in our congregation and community.

I know it's hard to take on more given the challenges we are already working and sometimes struggling to meet.

But that's where we are now called if we want to take Jesus' critical opinion....

“The children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.”

....and prove him wrong.

Amen.

Rev. Scott Myers
Westport Presbyterian Church
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