

Faithful With What We Have
by Rev. Frances Savill
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Luke 16:1-15

Do any of you ever imagine you've won one of the big lotteries – what you would do if you won 38 million dollars, or 20 million dollars?

Do you think about how you would spend it, or how you would give it away? My imagining goes something like this... I'd give 10% right away – because that's what we do. I'd want to give money to family, pay off a mortgage or two, pay for school.

I'd go on a fun family vacation, throw a big party, then invest the rest and use the interest to fund several charities that we already give to.

Then there are the conversations about if I had the annual income of someone like Warren Buffett or Jeff Bezos. I did a very quick search for the average annual salary of Top CEO's and the number came back at \$14.3 million a year. What would I do if I earned \$14.3 million a year?

It's a fun conversation to have... but that's all it is. Because I'm not going to make anything close to that, nor am I at all likely to win the lottery because I don't buy lottery tickets.

It's easy to be faithful with money I don't make, and with the millions I don't have, but what do I do with the \$1,000 or \$10,000 that I do have?

It's easy to have great plans for all the good I would do, but I'm pretty sure that I would do pretty much the same as I am doing now.

Jesus said, *"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much"* (vs 10)

This morning we turn to a very odd narrative in Luke's gospel. Many people avoid this narrative because it doesn't make a lot of sense to us. But I have found it

much more helpful as we read the whole gospel of Luke together, to understand this passage.

So, Jesus tells a story, the parable of a dishonest manager.

"Parable" is a transliteration of the Greek word "*parabolē*". It's compound word. "Para" is a Greek preposition "*next to*", and then "bolē" comes from a verb "*cast*" or "*to set*". A parable refers to a saying, a teaching, or a story that sits alongside another reality.

Jesus is trying to help us to understand His kingdom, and what it means to live in it, and the generosity of God, and how the kingdom invitation is for everyone, the parables are set alongside the teaching to bring us insight into what is taught or done by Jesus.

The parable begins: a rich man had a manager who was brought up on charges for wasting the master's possessions. The manager is given notice, he's about to be fired, there's a crisis and he has to decide what he is going to do. The manager decides to use his power and position to make friends with his master's debtors. He cancels part of their debts.

Now, we'd expect that the rich man would be furious with the dishonest manager and throw him in jail and make him repay the rich man in full all the debts he cancelled. But there is this unexpected twist, the rich man - the master commends him for his shrewdness. The manager is still fired, but there is something wise and commendable about him.

Jesus says in Verse 8 "*The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.*"

The dishonest manager was about to lose everything – so he cancels debts and helps other people.

Jesus says we are to be like that.

We are to be – not dishonest – but people who do things so that when our wealth fails, when our positions fail, when the things of this world fail - and they will all fail, live in a way that we will receive eternal dwellings.

It is very similar to Jesus' words at the end of this section that you can't serve two masters: God and money.

The manager is commended in being wise and understanding that money is something to be used.

Money can be a tool to be used as the shrewd manager used it, or money can be like a god. Money can be seen as something of power, that is trustworthy, but that is idolatry, and we are deceived in thinking that money is something to be trusted. Money, power, position, our jobs, our families, all the possible idols we might have will fail us.

An idol is something that is good – money is good, our families are good, our jobs and positions are good - but if this good thing is given a place of ultimate value, ultimate significance it will always disappoint, always fail – because it is not GOD.

The manager recognized that money was a tool that could help him and so he cancelled debts. In taking care of others, the shrewd manager knew that he was taking care of himself.

People who know God and his kingdom understand these things. God's people, who know God and how God works should know much more than this.

We are commended by Jesus to use the money we have – our wealth and all that we have – faithfully - as a tool to do good, to bless, to make friends for ourselves, generously giving, faithful with the little we have whatever that is, for that is being faithful with much.

Is that your attitude?

You have been invited, with the folks around you, into the kingdom of God... we are a Jesus community, learning to be his disciples.

How do we live together as this community of Jesus?
How do we see and relate to each other?

Do you see this church, this congregation, and say to yourself:
How can I use the tools I have, the resources, the power, the influence, and money I have, to bless and make friends in this kingdom of God's community?

Do you ask:

What can I do to as a follower of Jesus, to bless and be kind and generous to the people around me, in this place?

God asks us to be faithful with what we have – this day.

This is the first Sunday in Lent.

Lent is the season where we examine our hearts, our minds, where our money is, what we are treasuring, and making sure our hearts are fixed on God.

We can serve only one master first, and so many other things would fight for that first position in our lives.

So many forces try to influence us, so many sirens call to us.

In this season we check our hearts, our thoughts, our attitudes turning to Jesus and following him towards Jerusalem, learning to be faithful with what we have, learning to live in his kingdom, asking ourselves how we might bless and serve in his place.

Let us pray:

Jesus, you are on your way to Jerusalem, and we confess that we follow you haltingly, fitfully, show us how to be faithful today with the things we have. Show us how to bless this kingdom of God community who serve you, and bears your name. Remind us that you love us, and you have given yourself for us. Amen

Thanks be to God.