

Words of Welcome

Some words we hear, some conversations we are a part of, are difficult to follow and understand. That is what the text for today feels like. Sometimes that is what our lives feel like. Curious? Stay with me. We begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Come, let us worship the one who calls us here.

We gather to worship with joy and in hope.

Come, let us worship the one who desires our hearts.

We bring our whole selves in worship to our God.

Come, let us set aside all that distracts us from true worship.

We come as we are and ask the Spirit to gather us in and direct our vision.

Come, let us worship the one who calls us here.

We are here to worship with all that we are.

Derek C. Weber, February 2022

[Discipleship Ministries | Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C -... \(umcdiscipleship.org\)](#)

Hymn

As the deer

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1. As the deer pants for the water,
so my soul longs after you;
you alone are my heart's desire,
and I long to worship you.

Refrain:

*You alone are my strength, my shield;
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire,
and I long to worship you*

"As the deer," Words: Psalm 42; paraphrase, Martin Nystrom © Maranathal Music, 1984
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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God our Creator,

You sustain your creation as the source of life for every precious thing.

You have given us more than we could ever earn or deserve, and so we offer you our love and loyalty, for without you, we would not be.

Receive our worship this day, O God.

Speak to us in the sounds and silence of this hour, and amaze us with your promise of new life revealed in Jesus Christ, and your power at work in us and among us through the Spirit.

Generous God,

You have enriched us with life worth living, but we confess we often squander your good gifts. We have wasted our time and energy, but held tightly to things we think we need.

Forgive our foolish priorities and those times we overlooked the needs of others. Inspire us to live more generously, trusting your goodness to sustain us always.

Lord, send us your Holy Spirit to give us a fresh understanding of the Scriptures this day. Challenge us and change our lives as we encounter your wisdom and truth, through Christ, your Living Word. Amen

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Assurance of Pardon

Now that we have let go of the pain, the bitterness, the anger of our lives, let us be kind, tender-hearted, and gentle towards each other, forgiving as God has forgiven us.

We are God's beloved children,
and will model God's grace and love in our hearts.

Thanks be to God! We are forgiven! Amen.

Written by Thom Shuman, and posted on Lectionary Liturgies. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.ca/>.

Scripture Reading Luke 16: 1-13

¹⁶Then Jesus said to the disciples, 'There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ²So he summoned him and said to him, "What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer." ³Then the manager said to himself, "What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes." ⁵So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, "How much do you owe my master?" ⁶He answered, "A hundred jugs of olive oil." He said to him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty." ⁷Then he asked another, "And how much do you owe?" He replied, "A hundred containers of wheat." He said to him, "Take your bill and make it eighty." ⁸And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. ⁹And 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.

¹⁰ 'Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹²And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message Unknowns

I usually begin the message with something to draw you into the story. Today I got nothing! This scripture is downright difficult. It doesn't matter how many times I read it, it feels disjointed, about things that are not connected, and simply ridiculous. Why would a boss congratulate a dishonest person who has cooked the books for his own sake? I feel like I am watching a drama unfold that is out of some mafia movie with backroom deals and manipulation. Somehow this story just doesn't belong in Jesus' repertoire. And yet here it is in gospel of Luke with the words coming out of the mouth of Jesus.

There is the saying, misery loves company, well the misery here is that anything I read as I tried to see what others understood about this scripture starts out pretty much the same way...no one really knows what this is all about. Still, it is here and rather than skip over it and not deal with it, let's wrestle with it a little.

We know that parables have layers and we can't get to all the layers every time we consider a parable, but maybe today we can scratch the surface as we ask, "What is there for us in these words?" We take into account that parables present more of a problem to be puzzled over than a story with a moral to be learned.

So here we have a rich man and his manager and we learn that the manager is about to lose his job because he has cheated his employer out of wealth. It goes on to tell us what the manager did as he anticipated his loss of employment. After he was canned, he didn't want to get his hands dirty and he didn't want to lose his prestige by begging so, he plans out a scheme that will have others indebted to him because he gave them a break on their bill. One of those, you scratch my back and I'll scratch your moments. All of this scheming has the rich man slapping the manager on the back in a gesture of congratulations.

Now none of this seems to fit with either our Christian ethics or a good moral compass, so what is going on here? Well, the answer seems to lay in the next words, "for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. ⁹And 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."

One person writing on this passage had this to say, "

What is interesting about the parable is that the master "commended the dishonest manager" for his actions even though they likely had a negative impact on the master's bottom line. Perhaps the master was impressed that the manager was finally acting like a manager! Had the manager cared for his master's wellbeing with the same level of urgency and creativity, as when his own wellbeing was at stake, then perhaps the manager would still have a job. So it is

with those who belong to the kingdom of God. We have been entrusted with the resources of God's kingdom. Will we act on behalf of the kingdom with the same sense of urgency and creativity as if our own personal wellbeing depended on it?¹

But what of this dishonest wealth? Even though in our personal and church lives we don't like to talk about money, we think it a taboo topic, Jesus never shied away from questions and teachings about money and wealth. Money, wealth, prestige, power all have the ability of moving us away from God and more into caring about ourselves. The last line of the reading is one that people flippantly and often incorrectly quote whether they know it is comes from the Bible or not, "You cannot serve God and wealth."

As Christians it is hard to deny that we live in world that forces us to serve both. Nothing is ever so neat and tidy or cut and dry that we can say that we do not end up serving wealth. We need money to live, to eat, to keep a roof over our heads, and have something left over, and, if we are lucky, to be able to do more interesting things with our money. But maybe this is at the core of the issue. Is our heart set on obtaining more and more wealth for ourselves or is our heart set on our relationship with God, and so wealth is used not only for our benefit but the benefit of others?

Given Jesus' care and concern for the poor and knowing that the next parable in the scripture is about a rich man ending up in hell and a poor man in heaven, there may be something very important to think about regarding how we view money, attend to it, and share it with those who don't have the benefits we may have.

Going back to thinking about dishonest wealth, because I can tell you that I am still having a hard time relating to the dishonest manager and his being commended for his actions, let's consider another opinion on what the words, "dishonest wealth" may be pointing to as shared by another on the meaning of this term by John Nolland in the World Biblical Commentary Series. He writes, "Another way to interpret "dishonest wealth" is wealth obtained through the dishonest systems of this world. In other words, all wealth is considered "dishonest" because the economic systems of this present age are inherently corrupted. But this "dishonest wealth" doesn't imply willfully dishonest actions by individuals. It simply is shorthand for the wealth and resources at our disposal in this lifetime, as opposed to the riches of God's kingdom to come."²

That is helpful as it relates to why our own wealth may be dishonest. It may be because inevitably we make money through economic systems that are unbalanced and are geared so that a few make profits on the backs of others. Even as we work in those systems for our own well-being and those we love, we too end up participating in corrupt or broken economic systems, so our wealth can be

¹ [Luke 16:1-13 \(aplainaccount.org\)](https://aplainaccount.org) Accessed September 16, 2022.

² Ibid.

understood as dishonest as it doesn't honour the most vulnerable in our communities and has the danger of moving us away from relationship with God.

Regardless of how we might interpret this parable the one thing that is certain in the example and teachings of Jesus is that relationships matter. The poor, sick, lonely, hungry, those who are suffering, matter. Our relationship to money matters because it can take away our focus on matters of the heart.

Verses 10 through 12 are puzzling. "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?¹²And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?"

Now I basically failed my logics class in college, so I will be the first to admit that I have a hard time following this reasoning, but maybe this is saying that how we use our resources matters. Again, I use the words of another, "It's as if Jesus asks, 'why would I entrust you with the kingdom of God when you have not done what I commanded with the resources you already have—resources that are almost worthless compared to the true riches of the kingdom?'"³

All of the congregations I am working with right now are going through a time of discerning what they have for resources from people to passion and energy to finances, so maybe this parable has something to say to those situations and to any situation where we find ourselves considering where we spend our time, energy, money, and talent. It likely also has something to say about who we attend to with our time, energy, money, and talent.

I know that I have not made a clear conclusion to what this parable is saying. I don't believe I can as I am still, as with others, pondering what Jesus was really getting at with this story. Yet, questioning of the biblical texts to uncover meaning in our time is a practice for all of our life's experiences and decisions. It times, such as with this parable, when we cannot come to clear understandings, it can be a place to acknowledge that we can go through long periods of time where things seem unknowable. The past is over, the future yet to be determined, and we sit in the struggle for meaning and purpose.

Yet if we remember that for Jesus, it is about relationship and how we use our lives for bringing hope, peace, grace, joy, and love into the world, then we can trust that God is in the places where we don't understand either the Word of God or we have to sit in the times of unknowns in our lives.

So there we are, in the uncomfortable closing that did not close, still with questions left without answers. Welcome to living faith, one that makes us question, reflect, and still believe and trust that God is in it all. We are not abandoned, but are given

³ Ibid.

the opportunity to live out our faith, even when the path is not clear. May our focus be on serving God and others in love and grace. In Christ, with Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God in whom we live and move and have our being,
each week our prayers join with those of Christians around the world
to seek your healing grace for those in need
and to pray for justice and mercy in your fragile creation.

We thank you for the ways in which your Spirit can surprise us,
bringing healing and hope in situations which cause us to despair.
Encourage us when we feel overwhelmed.

God, speak to us a word of hope

Embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people living face to face with war and violence,
for the peoples of Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Myanmar, Ethiopia and Tigre, South Sudan
and all those places where ancient hatreds burn.

God, speak to us a word of peace

Embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people living with illness and suffering,
for those struggling with disability or waiting for treatment,
and for those who know grief or fear or loneliness

God, speak to us a word of healing

Embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people facing discrimination and social prejudice,
for those who are bullied at school, at work or at home,
and for those who are made ashamed of who they are

God, speak to us a word of dignity

Embrace us with your love.

We remember before you people caught up in economic uncertainty,
those worried for the future, or struggling to make ends meet

And in a time when the Royal Family grieves and the world grieves with them the
passing of the Queen. As King Charles takes his place as the new sovereign...

God, speak to us a word of reassurance

Embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today your whole creation in its increasing vulnerability.
Teach us how to care for the rips and tears in the fabric of the world you love
so that all your creatures may live together in health and wholeness.

God, speak to us a word of wisdom

Embrace us with your love.

Receive all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, as we offer together the words Jesus taught us:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to the offering

In every generation, God calls us to participate in the world's healing and renewal. The gifts we offer will help touch lives with God's renewing grace. May you be encouraged to be generous as God is generous.

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Hymn

Take my life and let it be

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| 1. Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days:
let them flow in ceaseless praise. | 2. Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee. |
| 3. Take my voice and let me sing
always, only for my King;
take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee. | 4. Take my silver and gold:
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose. |
| 5. Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart: it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne. | 6. Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself and I will be
ever, only, all for thee. |

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Benediction

Go with confidence and commitment,
to serve God in ways large and small
for the sake of Christ, our friend and Saviour.

And may God bless you and keep you;
may God's face shine upon you,
and bring you joy and peace, now and evermore. Amen.

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