



## **Being Faithful**

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Proper 20, Year C

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable to you O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

Today's gospel is once again a challenging scripture. We have a rich man and a manager(steward); 'a person who manages another's property or financial affairs'. (Dictionary.com) who is squandering property.

I want to start with the story that precedes this one. In Luke 15:11-32, is the story of the prodigal son. There is a father, and a son who takes his inheritance and squanders it, and a son who stays with his father and works the family property. In this parable, the son who squanders his inheritance is deemed lost and then found and there is great rejoicing in his return. He says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." (Lk 15:18-19) And we hear great anger from the son who didn't leave and had been there all the time.

How is this squandering different from the squandering of the manager? The first thing is that the manager(steward) is a hired hand to the rich man. He is not related and is without any claim to the money that he collects. And we must ask why the rich man accuses this manager(steward) based on hearsay, not with direct observation. And how this applies to our own questioning of a person's words based on one untrustworthy action.

I was reminded of a fable about how we trust others. Remember the Aesop's fables we read which had a moral lesson at the end of each one? The one that comes to mind is the 'The Shepherd boy and the wolf'. In it, the boy is tending his master's sheep, thinking about what he would do if he saw a wolf. His master told him to call for help and the people of the village would drive the wolf away. He hadn't seen a wolf, but ran to the village and yelled 'wolf'. The people of the village responded. No wolf, but the shepherd was laughing. A few days later, he again shouts, 'wolf' and again the villagers come and see him laughing. But one evening, a wolf really did show up. He again yelled, 'wolf', but the villagers did not run to help him as before. The moral of the story is, "Liars are not believed even when they speak the truth."

Perhaps the rich man had heard from others about this manager and his practices. And when we hear this story, we want to see the steward get what's coming; losing his position. But the parable Jesus tells is different. The steward is commended for acting shrewdly because he has collected from all the debtors some amount. Less than what was owed, but something.

So now I want you to think about this manager(steward) from a different perspective. What if... "by reducing debts he may have been exposing the unfairness of the existing payment structure?" (G. Penny Nixon) Was the action ethically questionable? Some would say yes, but might we hold up this manager(steward) as doing what was necessary? providing justice for an oppressive system. I wonder if you have thought about whether he was a good father? a faithful loving husband? someone who took care of others? or shared what he had? Could we consider forgiving his actions?

We must err on the side of mercy and forgiveness; allowing the Kingdom of God to show forth in our lives. Lives which are more inclusive, more loving, more caring. Our lives and possessions are a gift of God to be used to advance God's kingdom in which all are cared for with compassion; all are seen as a member of the Body of Christ. All are worthy by virtue of being a child of God. This is what we call Baptismal Theology. Treating each person we meet with dignity, seeing Christ in them and acting in such a way that they may see Christ in us.

We are at the beginning of Stewardship season, and these lessons are chosen because it is the time of the year we begin conversations about our gifts. Which we call Time, Talent and Treasure, remembering that all we are and all we have and all we do are gifts given to us by God. We are merely stewards of them for the time we are given here on earth. We rebel against this because we want to be in control of our 'stuff' and our lives. It is here that we need to remember what it means to be faithful which "is to be true in one's word, promises, vows. loyal and constant, reliable, trusted, believed. Adhering to a standard." . (Dictionary.com)

Are we using our gifts in a way that honors God? Are we caring for ourselves and others and creation?

Being faithful is to use what we have been given for the glory of God and for the advancement of God's kingdom. It is to search out what or whom has been lost and rejoice when it or they return; like in last week's lost sheep and lost coin. Our gospel ends with, "you cannot serve God and wealth." This is where we must acknowledge the consequences to others as a result of our actions. Are we so concerned about our position that we don't care about consequences? We make choices every day that impact the lives of others. We have moved from being a

country where businesses were closed on Sundays so that all might have an opportunity for Sabbath to being a country where there are all sorts of activities to keep us from the Sabbath. Sabbath was for justice; it ensures everyone gets a day off from work; a time for worship and relationship. Both with God and others.

Walter Brueggemann in his book Sabbath as Resistance, says “Sabbath is a practical divestment so that neighborly engagement, rather than production and consumption, defines our lives.” (p18) Breggemann reminds us that Sabbath transforms us; that Sabbath is an invitation to accept the idea that what we need is given to us. That all we have, all we do and all we are is given to us by God. Given to us to share and to give away. When we are unable to see need around us, we are unable to see God’s generosity, God’s abundance. When we can open ourselves to care for all of God’s creation, we can recognize our own abundance.

Friday, there was a climate strike, all around the globe; an estimated 4 million came out in 163 countries. Children and young people want us to know, “you had a future, and so should we”. From Asia-Pacific region, to cities around the globe; Melbourne, to Sydney, Quezon City, Berlin, Brighton, Edinburgh, London, New York City, Baltimore, Des Moines, Nashville, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Ventura, Camarillo. All across the world. Standing up against the destruction of God’s creation.

In Jesus’ time, the Pharisees were characterized as “lovers of money” and this is why we have this parable from Jesus in Luke. The Pharisees had lost their vision of the larger picture; of who they were as people of God and what they had been called to do and be. Instead, they traded that for wealth, power and control. In this parable, Jesus is saying, serve wealth, power and control **OR** serve God. Stand up

against injustice and oppression. Allow a debt to be reduced. Understand the consequences of the choices you make about how to use the gifts that God has entrusted to you.

I want to leave you with A Franciscan Blessing that reminds us how to do this:

May God bless us with discomfort  
at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,  
so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger  
at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed  
for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war,  
so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness  
to believe that we can make a difference in this world,  
so that we can do what others claim cannot be done,  
to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

**Amen.**