

Dear friends,

Today we read one of Jesus' most challenging parables. A manager's dishonesty has been found out, and frightened for his own future, he makes a series of dodgy deals with his master's clients. The disciples are then invited to reflect on how best to live in the real world, and whether their true master is God or worldly matters.

Ian and I have just returned from a break in Jersey which was really lovely – the ferry crossings to and fro were not! The ferry crossing took 7 hours instead of four and a half – and it was exceedingly rough; stabilisers on the ferry would have been useful! No wonder the disciples in an open boat in a storm were scared until Jesus came to their aid and calmed the storm. I hope that you are coping with life as well as you may. Every blessing – Margaret.

Call to worship: God of love, we hear you calling us.

Tired and aching, lost and lonely – we come to you. Embrace us.

God of wisdom, we hear you calling us.

Unsure and afraid, wishing and hoping – we come to you. Embrace us.

God of joy – we hear you calling us.

Bright and breezy, smiling and laughing – we come to you. Embrace us.

Generous God, you gave us everything. You embraced the limitations of the human condition – you felt the pain of love – you took the risks.

Help us not to turn you away - nor to crucify your love, even though sometimes the scale and perfection of your love is too much to grasp.

We thank you for that love.

Pour it into our lives, so that we may give all that we have and are for you and for each other and for the world. In Jesus' name we pray – Amen.

The words to 'There's a wideness' written by Frederick William Faber [1814-1863]

StF 416

1 There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice which is more than liberty.

2 There is plentiful redemption in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members in the sorrows of the Head.

3 There is grace enough for thousands of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations in that upper home of bliss.

4 For the love of God is broader than the measures of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.

5 But we make his love too narrow by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness with a zeal he will not own.

6 If our love were but more simple we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined by the presence of our Lord.

Prayer: From sunrise to sunset, from East to West, from earth to heaven, your name is worthy to be praised – your glory shines above all things. We worship & adore you, our wonderful God. Amen. Lord, we regret the times we have been unwise or short-sighted – when we have not through the impact of our actions.

Give us the ability to make adjustments to our lives – to build each other up – and to invest ourselves in ways which are beneficial to all.

Help us when we get confused – when things aren't clear – when we injure others and ourselves, whether deliberately or accidentally.

Forgive us, restore us and help us to repair what has been broken. Amen.

God, you turn your face from our wrongdoing, but you do not turn away from us.

Every time we come to you, acknowledging our woundedness and folly, you bring us back.

You see the person you made us to be and wipe the slate clean again.

There is no residue left behind – no mark on our record that you cannot erase.

You embrace us unconditionally and turn our brokenness to beauty.

Thank you, all-forgiving God. Restore us to you and to our community. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 16: 1-13: Holy Bible – taken from THE HOLY BIBLE: EASY TO READ VERSION. Copyright 2006 by World Bible Translation Center, Inc, and used by permission.

Jesus said to his followers: 'Once there was a rich man. He hired a manager to take care of his business. Later, he learned that his manager was cheating him. So he called the manager in and said to him: "I have heard bad things about you. Give me a report of what you have done with my money. You can't be my manager anymore."

So, the manager thought to himself, 'What will I do? My master is taking my job away from me. I am not strong enough to dig ditches. I am too proud to beg. I know what I will do! I will do something to make friends, so that when I lose my job, they will welcome me into their homes.'

So the manager called in each person who owed the master some money. He asked the first one: 'How much do you owe my master?' he answered: 'I owe him 100 jars of olive oil.' The manager said to him: "Here is your bill. Hurry! Sit down and make the bill less. Write 50 jars."

Then the manager asked another one: "How much do you owe my master?" he answered: 'I owe him 100 measures of wheat.' Then the manager said to him: "Here is your bill; you can make it less. Write 80 measures."

Later the master told the dishonest manager that he had done a smart thing. Yes, worldly people are smarter in their business with each other than spiritual people are.

I tell you, use the worldly things you have now to make 'friends' for later. Then, when those things have gone, you will be welcomed into a home that lasts forever. Whoever can be trusted with small things can also be trusted with big things. Whoever is dishonest in little things will be dishonest in big things too. If you cannot be trusted with worldly riches, you will not be trusted with the true riches. And if you cannot be trusted with the things that belong to someone else, you will not be given anything of your own.

You cannot serve two masters at the same time. You will hate one master and love the other. Or you will be loyal to one and not care about the other. You cannot serve God and Money at the same time.

Comment:

I always find this a difficult passage – but here Jesus' teaching does move to a proper attitude to possessions. His audience consists of the disciples – literally 'those who have to learn'. L-drivers! The story begins and ends with a rich man. Could he be an absentee landlord? The manager is his trained and trusted delegate. An estate manager was often a slave born in the house, specially trained, and trusted in the supervision of its wealth. Our manager here is found to be 'squandering', rather like the prodigal son in an earlier well-known parable. Having been caught, the manager has to 'give an account', presumably for his successor. How can he set up his own future security? Some commentators say he decided to feather his future nest by waiving his commission on his dealings. Consumer goods were traded at high interest rates. Grain, salt, beer and oil could have 100 per cent commission. The manager makes friends for the future by doing away with his commission. He also therefore avoided breaking God's law about taking interest – and his master will not lose anything by the deal.

The master does not approve of the original dishonesty, but he does admire his manager's present shrewdness.

Can Jesus' followers learn from the sly dealings of this rascal? For the disciples, he is to be a model – not of dishonesty but of prudence in coping with a crisis. Christians are challenged by this story to use their possessions prudently in coping with any crisis resulting from their allegiance to Jesus. In doing so, they will have 'friends in high places' at the end of time.

'Money' or dishonest wealth used to be translated as 'mammon'. Mammon and Amen have the same root: 'being firm' – that in which I put my trust. The shift of meaning to money or possessions is to be expected – but the adjective 'dishonest' implies the seductive tendency of wealth to become 'master'. Towards the end of the reading there is a generalisation on routine fidelity in the use of possessions – while at the very end we have a general maxim on the choice between wealth or God as one's 'master'.

Meditation of a modern-day Christian. Taken from 'A Most Amazing Man' year C by Nick Fawcett. Copyright 2009 Nick Fawcett.

What does he mean, 'dishonest wealth'?

He's barking up the wrong tree there, for my money has been fairly earned, legal and above board. Only it's not that simple, is it – for who can say what deals it's financed, palms greased, services bought or wrongs contributed to?

It may seem innocent enough, the cash in my pocket, yet it's a dangerous thing and to be handled with caution – not necessarily the root of all evil in itself, but soon becoming so should we love it too much. And as I thought about those words of Jesus – *really thought* – I realised I do just that, for I found myself increasingly uncomfortable, trying to water down and explain away what I'd rather not hear. I talk of using money wisely, giving to those in need – but more often than not my charity starts at home.....and stays there.

I talk of fair trade, ethical investment, yet frequently it's *all* talk and nothing more.

Time and again, as Jesus warned, I attempt to serve two masters – and no prizes for guessing, when the two clash, which one wins.

I may *get* my money fairly, but do I *use* it fairly as well?

That's the question. The first is easy enough – the second not easy at all.

Prayer:

Smiling, loving Jesus, we ask to love as you love.

To bring good news to the poor [there are so many living in poverty in our world] – to release the captives [there are so many prisoners of conscience, locked away with no fair trial] – to bring sight to the blind [there are so many disabled physically and others damaged psychologically] – to free the oppressed [there are so many who need hope – used and exploited and chained to an unjust system].

Controversial Jesus, we ask to touch as you touch – to touch black hands and white hands – to hold the limp hands of those who don't believe they are worth holding – to kiss the haunted eyes of the beaten and the tortured – to hold the body of a starving child, dying where there is no pity – to embrace the weeping woman who grieves at an open grave.

Compassionate Jesus, forgive us when we turn a blind eye to suffering and poverty - teach us to love and care.

Forgive us our intolerance and suspicion – teach us to understand and to welcome.

Forgive us our selfishness and complacency – teach us to be generous and open-hearted.

May your kingdom come. Amen.

The words to ' Lord, for the years' written by Timothy Dudley-Smith [1926-2024] StF 470

1 Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided, urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way, sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided. Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

2 Lord, for that Word of life which fires us, speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze, teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us, Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

3 Lord, for our land, in this our generation, spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care; for young and old, for commonwealth and nation, Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

4 Lord, for our world; when we disown and doubt him, loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain; hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him, Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

5 Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us, self on the cross and Christ upon the throne; past put behind us, for the future take us, Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Close:

Illuminating God, you are the light in whom there is no darkness. In Jesus we see your radiance.

We believe that no-one will be turned away from this light.

We believe that this light shines for everyone in the world.

Light of liberation and love, shine in the darkness of debt and desperation.

Light of the world, lead us where you want us to go. Lead us on the path to your kingdom.

Light of the world, even when we face the unexpected, light our way with the promise that we are not alone. Amen.

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