

It happens all the time in sports. A player fakes one direction, then goes another way. The fake is often preceded by some deceptive movement to catch the opponent's attention in order to leave them behind in surprise. You need to keep an eye on the wider play unfolding not to be misdirected. . . and not just in sports.

Parables can be like that. Not that Jesus intends to deceive, but Jesus does frequently intend to surprise. Consider Luke 16:1-13, and in particular verse 8a: "his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted *shrewdly*." Commending dishonesty is a clear misdirection. Its purpose in the parable is not to propose an ethical standard of "whatever works." The purpose is to evoke surprise that beckons a deeper look into Jesus' intent.

In this case, that deeper look leads away from the misdirection of dishonesty and toward the hidden gem of "shrewdness." "Shrewd" often takes on negative interpretations today. But the word used here appears in other parables of Jesus. Jesus uses the same word in Matthew 7:24 to commend a "*wise*" man who built his house on rock, not sand. Jesus uses the same word in Matthew 25:2 to commend five "*wise*" young women who took spare oil for their lamps.

The gem commended in this parable is *not* juggling the books or manipulating others to your advantage. Those are misdirections. The gem commended here is the shrewd wisdom of living in this present day as if the future matters. Because it does. God holds the future in hands that are at once holy and gracious, just and compassionate. That future begins now as we seek to embody those same qualities in Christ's service.

***For Reflection and Action:***

*How might such shrewdness shape my following of Jesus this week in a new way;*

*Or, in a way I have neglected of late?*