SERMON
Sunday September 21 2025
Luke 16:1-13

I have to admit that although I have read this parable of the unjust steward many times before, I scratched my head in perplexity this week. It is a really hard parable to understand! I think Jesus intended for us to be thinkers about some of the parables he tells, even if we are confused.

The passage from Luke 16 is challenging in many ways in its apparent affirmation of a dishonest businessperson who has learned the art of the deal. What are we to say about the character of the dishonest manager? Was he looking out for his best interests or was he a bit of a "Robin Hood," trying to support those facing economic burdens, probably cheated by his boss? While we cannot commend this behavior – and neither does Jesus – we can appreciate Jesus' recognition that we need to be wise in the use of our personal and congregational resources. We should be especially wise because of the potential pitfalls in our desire for economic well-being. We can put economic security ahead of our relationship with God, the well-being of our neighbours, and the survival of the planet. Money cannot be the center of our lives. It cannot get in the way of our obligation to God, our self-care and care for friends and family, and our stewardship of the earth. Our use of our bounty must be subservient to our commitment to God and determined by our commitment to God. Our faith must shape our economic and vocational values, not the other way around. In the spirit of Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps*, we need to ask regularly: *"Is this how Jesus would behave in terms of personal and corporate economics? Do my buying patterns reflect a care for my neighbour, the vulnerable, and the planet? Do I place consumerism, security, and comfort ahead of generosity and care for the needs of vulnerable persons?"* Luke 16 invites us to an examination of conscience on the personal and challenges us to see our decisions in light of our spiritual commitments. We need to be smart and also compassionate, shrewd and also generous, looking beyond our self-interest to the common good.

One of the things that is common in many churches is that we don't talk much about money-even though Jesus talks about it more than anything when he teaches. Ultimately, we don't want to offend people. But I think it should offend us more that there are entire elements of our life that we feel Scripture does not speak to. I think most of us genuinely struggle to make sense of our economic lives and would welcome some counsel. And I think that's part of what this text indeed speaks to, the struggle to make good use of our resources.

So how do we talk about money and faith together. First there is no simple "biblical" view about economics. Why? Probably because our relationship to our wealth is pretty complex, and "sound bite" theology or biblical maxims don't work. At the same time, there are a few themes that seems to run across the Gospels and make an appearance here.

The first, 1) wealth is both a blessing and a responsibility. As throughout Scripture, we are blessed to be a blessing, and we are held accountable less for what resources we have accumulated than how we use them. From this point of view, perhaps the shrewdness or prudence of the manager comes through his recognition that he has privileged amassing wealth to developing relationships. It may be that he earned his money by charging interest on the amounts his lord loaned out to others. Finding himself between a rock and a hard place, he cuts the amount others owe by his surcharge, avoiding further accusation that he is defrauding his master but strengthening, perhaps even establishing, relationships that will sustain him in a time of need.

The second 2) wealth – along with status, power, and privilege – is fleeting. One day this manager is on top of the world; the next he is faced with disaster. We are not so far removed. Living expenses are higher than they have ever been. There seems to be no end to the rising costs. There are many people who will be losing jobs in North America and they will lose what they have amassed. When faced with the pronouncement that we cannot serve God and Money we might remember that whereas the Lord's attention, care, and providence are constant, Money proves to be a pretty fickle, and ultimately untrustworthy, master.

The third 3) in times of crisis, God often appears where we least expect God to be, coming to us "from below" to render help and aid. There are lots of "crises" in Luke that turn on receiving help from unexpected places – the Jewish traveler left for dead along the road who is saved by a Samaritan; the rich man (in next week's text) who begs for help from Lazarus, the slave he ignored; this manager now suddenly dependent on those who used to look to him for loans. From Mary's *Magnificat* through the beatitudes to Jesus' death on the cross, God regularly shows up in those places where we least expect God to be so that we are not tempted to place our faith in the wrong place.

And perhaps this is the key – or at least one of the keys! – to this passage: we are placed on this earth to love and care for each other, not to separate ourselves from each other with wealth, status, or privilege. I've heard it said that St. Augustine asserted that God gave us people to love and things to use, and original sin manifests itself in our penchant to confuse those two, loving things and using people.

Right now I want you to think of one name of one person, one relationship, that you want to improve or deepen and so deserves your investment of time, energy, and money. That is, let's take seriously that God gives us people to love, that we are given all of our resources to care for others, and that none of us know how much time we may have to do that.

This is not a challenge, and no one will judge the outcome. It is simply an invitation to see those around us as God's true gifts to us, the "honest wealth" and true riches of life in community.

Amen.