



“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. So he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ Then 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. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’”

The parable of the manager is a challenging parable to scholars and theologians alike because we do not know what to make of the rich man who commends the manager when he declares that the debtors to the landowner owe **less** than what the manager first charged them. Was the manager over charging them, probably not, was this how he the manager would make income for rich man and for himself—yes. Was the system a practice that left the people without land poorer—definitely, perhaps even exploited by people in power in our current understanding.

“So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ Then 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.’ And 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. And 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”.

This Sunday we are focusing our attention on the word “squandered” or “wasted” a word also used about the younger son who spent his inheritance and then returns home to his father. Clearly the manager or steward mismanaged what he had been asked to do. It is not his bad management or unrighteousness that is commended by the landowner. Instead, the manager is commended for turning upside down a system of debt and debtors that would have been surprising to the tenants raising wheat and harvesting oil. Most of all, it would have been surprising to the rich in the crowds listening to Jesus, and to the poor listening to Jesus. Parables do that—turn our thinking upside down. We are asked to think about what happened to the debtors—they have been *forgiven* their great debts either from the funds of the landowner or the manager. The text does not tell us. We do know something happened.

Jesus follows this passage reminding his followers again that no one can serve God and wealth (mammon). We are reminded that wealth is *all things* not just money, because all things are gifts from God. Stewardship means everything belongs to God.

“And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No 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.”

Jesus points toward our relationship to God, directly impacting our relationships with our neighbors--those we know and the strangers that are being welcomed to eat at a table set by God's bounty. We are the stewards of that bounty. Perhaps it seems easier to assume we have to see directly how our actions hurt the poor, as we see in the passage from Amos, but God sees how often we are poor managers and invites us to live another way.

“Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, “When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale?” Amos 8:4-5

God know our hearts. God desires to give us the blessing of abundance, not because it is for us, but because is for us to share. As Saint Francis, who saw goodness in all of God's creation, said “For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned.” We are all God's beloved.