

## A LITTLE FAITHFUL

9/22/19 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Proper 20 (C): Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

Have you ever had to tell a story, give a speech, or make a presentation—maybe even tell a joke—in a room where there was a mixed crowd? For instance, say it's a “bring your grandparents to school day”, so half the audience are elementary-age kids and the other half, retired people, mostly in their 70s. And, you know the only way you can get your point across to the kids is to use an example involving SpongeBob SquarePants. When you tell the story, the kids laugh hysterically, but the grandparents are baffled. They numbly shake their heads and lean over to their neighbors, asking who SpongeBob is and why he wears SquarePants.

Many scholars suggest [t-HAT] ~~that~~ is akin to what's happening in the series of sermons offered up in Luke's Gospel. You see the Lukan community lived in a very diversified, urban setting, so Luke intentionally played to the mixed audience.

It's not that he contradicts himself by quoting Jesus saying money is bad in one sermon, and then that money can be used for good in another. It's that one story would have appealed to half the audience—those who were already living lives of discipleship and just needed helpful reminders about how to maintain the spiritual disciplines they'd already begun—and another story to the other half—those who were just beginning to wonder how they could possibly change their comfortable ways to be disciples of Christ.

From that perspective it's very clear that Luke understood he couldn't use one story to communicate the same message to both audiences. At the same time, this morning's Gospel reading does use some language that can be a little mind-boggling. How is it, we ask, that a dishonest person might be rewarded in any way?

So, let me re-tell the passage in a way that might help. It seems to me that this manager was not doing a good job at all. He wasn't keeping track of what the people owed his master, so when the master came around and said, “I want my money,” the manager had no idea how much that was. Which, of course, would be a perfectly good reason to fire him!

So, to save his job, the manager ran around from debtor to debtor, scoring up what was owed. Now, in this telling of the story, the people would have been a little surprised to have the manager knocking on their door, because he'd been letting them go without paying their debts for some time. To help smooth things over, he gives each of them a discount on what they owed. This not only helped get the money owed to the master, it developed good will between them.

When the manager went back to the master with all that he had collected—which, remember, was zero until that day—the master was overjoyed! Of course, he wanted to reward the manager. The passage uses words like “dishonest” and “shrewd”, but we might use words like quick-thinker, creative, or clever instead.

The message to us is it's never too late to change your ways. We might not be able to completely undo the selfish mistakes we've made up until now, but we can change how we do things going forward, and, hopefully, in the process, become a better steward of the things for which we have responsibility, so that the good of the whole is best served.

Luke's interpretation of the parable reinforces that we don't have to turn the world on end to be a good disciple, we simply have to make an effort. He says: "Whoever is faithful in a very little [way] is faithful also in much."

I wonder what places in your life God is calling for you to change; places where any slight change will not be easy or comfortable; places that you can't make a huge change, but making a small change would make a difference for the good of all.

We're going to take a little longer to reflect than we usually do, so in the next three to four minutes, take all the time that you need to really pray about this, to check in down deep about where you might be a better steward—in some small way—of the things for which you have responsibility, so that the good of the whole is better served. I'll signal the end of the time with my voice.

[Silence]

As you bring your attention back to this room, back to this liturgy, I'll leave you with the passage from Luke I mentioned earlier, remember: "Whoever is faithful in a very little [way] is faithful also in much."

-AMEN

## The Collect

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?" ("Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols?") "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored? O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!

## Psalms 79:1-9

- 1 O God, the heathen have come into your inheritance;  
they have profaned your holy temple; \*  
they have made Jerusalem a heap of rubble.
- 2 They have given the bodies of your servants as food for the birds of the air, \*  
and the flesh of your faithful ones to the beasts of the field.
- 3 They have shed their blood like water on every side of Jerusalem, \*  
and there was no one to bury them.
- 4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors, \*  
an object of scorn and derision to those around us.
- 5 How long will you be angry, O LORD? \*  
will your fury blaze like fire for ever?
- 6 Pour out your wrath upon the heathen who have not known you \*  
and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon your Name.
- 7 For they have devoured Jacob \*  
and made his dwelling a ruin.
- 8 Remember not our past sins;  
let your compassion be swift to meet us; \*  
for we have been brought very low.
- 9 Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your Name; \*  
deliver us and forgive us our sins, for your Name's sake.

## 1 Timothy 2:1-7

First of all, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable

in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time. For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

### **Luke 16:1-13**

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.' 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.

"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 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."