

“Faithful in Very Little”  
Isaiah 58; Ephesians 4:17-32;  
Luke 16:1-14

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I think it's interesting that today's Gospel reading comes directly after the story of the Prodigal Son, where we are left wondering what happened with the elder son. Does he go in? Does he join the party, or does he not? It almost feels to me like Jesus is extending that and suggesting what happens to the older son. He becomes a rich man who is really not very excited about anybody squandering his property, his stuff. He's dealt with that before. So when he hears somebody say his steward, his manager, is squandering *his* property, he doesn't ask the steward to come right away and show him the books, and spend some time to decide whether he is actually guilty or not. He calls him in and basically says, “Bring your books to me because you no longer work for me.” Nice guy. Interesting perspective.

I think in some ways Jesus is setting up what he calls later “people of this age.” Here he is, the rich man, not really too sensitive to the needs of anyone else. Not sensitive to the needs of his steward. Notice I don't put God in this position in this parable at all. The rich man describes the age, a certain way people live, of culture, of the situation that the steward, the manager, just has to deal with. So he's got a decision to make.

So we've set the stage with the rich man and now we've got one who needs to make a decision. He's been let go, or almost. He's got just a little time left—he has to go get the books. It's interesting that we're let in on a little of the thought process. “I can't dig. I don't want to do physical labor and I'm too proud to beg. I don't want to change my circumstances in my life at all, really. So, I'll figure out how I can get some other people in debt to me through a little sleight of hand.” This isn't that unusual, even for us today. We still have models for this kind of character—for example, Dan Draper in “Mad Men.” He exchanges his identity for somebody else's. A little cheating along the way—what difference does it make as long as he is able to get ahead?

I would like to think about this visually, if I can do so. I have a plank balanced on this chair. If I stand in the middle, it's pretty stable. As weight is added to one end of the plank, I can move out along the plank in the opposite direction and keep it balanced. Now I almost didn't do this because it's kind of a spectacle, but then I thought it fits our society today. Isn't so much today about spectacle?

What I was thinking about is that being out here at the end of the plank is a little bit like that steward. He's gotten out to a place that is kind of spectacular in its own little way. He's a manager. He's gotten used to being in a place where people think he's pretty good—defying gravity a little bit. He has leveraged his way to an important position. Now his boss is saying he's going to take away his way of staying there. He's got to figure out a way to stay there, so he goes and finds somebody else who can help hold him up so he can be in this special place. Isn't that what so much of our culture, so much of life seems to be about, to get into that special place? Whether we call it

success, wealth, status, fame, we get into that special place. But what do we get when we get there? It's a little precarious. And where do I go from here? It's a little dangerous to go either way at this point.

There's a way in which we want to be up there in our own special place, and so it is with this manager. I think what Jesus goes on to say is, go ahead and make friends by dishonest means and let *them* welcome you into the eternal homes. There's a little irony there, isn't there? Can they really welcome you into the eternal homes, or if they do, what kind of home are they welcoming you into? I think Jesus is making a statement that is full of irony. Go ahead, make friends by dishonest means and see where it gets you.

What you really want is something that is a way to get across your life span that is not so precarious. You have somewhere to go. You're not just stuck out on a limb, out in space. Isn't that what our faith is all about? We have someone who not only shows us the way, but shows us where we will be able to go, that we have a home to go to? And what does Jesus ask? Does he say you've got to make your life more spectacular than that guy whose out there, famous for whatever? No. He says it's really about being faithful in very little.

Start out with that, being faithful with very little. Whatever you have, whatever you can do. It's about where we're looking to find our way. It's about whether we're going to let the world tell us we need to be spectacular or whatever, or we're going to believe that God wants us to come and know the wonder of human relationship in a family of faith in a relationship with a God that loves us, a God that forgives us, a God that embraces us, a God that supports us, and be faithful in very little. It may turn out that you will be given things to be really faithful about, but start there.

That's what stewardship is about. It's about recognizing whose way we're going to go, whether we feel the need to be the spectacular one of our society. Are we going to follow that way or are we going to follow God and respond to that God with a little faith? When we respond with a little faith, I think Jesus promises that there's a way that we go. We have a God that supports us, a Savior that leads us, a Spirit that encompasses our lives. It's about which master we choose and whether we'll just show a little faith.

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Gracious God, this world is reasonably chaotic. We see so many spectacular images, models of ways to be, but they don't really lead us to where we want to be—to you, to the fullness of life, and to the life everlasting. Lord, help us again see the wonder of your grace and love. Don't let us get stuck in the futility of our own minds, but renewed in our minds in Christ. Lord, let us have a little faith and respond to you with our lives in those little things we can do: the ways we can show love to another, the grace we can offer, the support we can give, the hope we can share. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.