

## ***“Carpe Diem! Seize the Day”***

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),  
Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, September 22, 2013

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

#### ***The Parable of the Dishonest Manager***

Then 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 account 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.’

*Jesus said, “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.” (Luke 16: 8)*

## ***Scandalous!***

This morning before us we have a difficult and disturbing text from the Holy Bible.

It is downright scandalous.

Our central Scripture for today has stumped

and puzzled many, many learned scholars and teachers,

good people of faith who have raised valid, tough questions.

*Is this an original saying of Jesus?*

*Could Jesus of Nazareth have said such a thing?*

*Since this parable is unique to the Gospel According to Luke,*

*did Luke roll his eyes as he set these words to ink?*

*Is a person who deceives through dishonesty for a positive cause*

*someone to be admired and followed? Is that what this is all about?*

*How could Jesus possibly commend a con man?*

Listen closely, my friends, and see what you hear.

*“Then Jesus said to his disciples,*

*“There was a rich man who had a manager,  
and charges were brought to him*

*that this man was squandering his property.”  
(Luke 16: 1)*

Kneeling before the master is the dishonest manager.

In your Bible version he may also be called the dishonest steward, or prudent.

The manager is now before the master,

and he’s about to be fired for mismanagement of funds

unless he can give an accounting.

We get to tune in to his internal conversation, his process of reasoning.

*(Here is the South we have figured out that it is perfectly okay to talk to yourself.*

*It’s when you start answering your own question that folks begin to wonder.)*

The manager says to himself,

*“I am too delicate to make a living digging ditches.*

*I am too proud to make a living begging for pennies.*

*I am too shrewd to give in or give up or give out.*

*I will make a living by giving.*

*I will give my all to fix this mess, please my master, and save my life.”*

Fallen, humiliated, almost dead to the world, with this resolve to act he is risen.

***Carpe Diem!*** He seizes the day!

The manager believes that the time has come to take decisive action.

It is as if the master gave the manager a wake up call.

No longer could he hit the snooze button and roll over for another ten minutes.

Gone are the days of dilly-dallying around;

gone are the days when he could put off today what he could do tomorrow;

gone are the days when he had the luxury to say,

*“Life will be business as usual.”*

**Time has come today.**

The manager takes command of his life and that for which he is responsible.

He calls in those who owe his master money

and persuades them to cut a deal

to remove a portion of their debt

so that the remainder would be paid.

*“You owe how much to my master? A hundred jugs of oil?*

*Write down fifty and pay me now.*

*You owe one hundred containers of wheat? Write down 80 and pay me now.”*

Was he removing his own percentage,

his own cut of the deal, his own slice of the pie?

Were these bad debts anyway,

so the master was pleased at last to receive something of what was owed?

Was he enabling the master to look very, very good

in the eyes of the community?

Whatever his motive, he had a batch of lemons and he made lemonade.

Whatever his motive, we join with the disciples  
in overhearing the rest of the story.

We get to see the results.

The results are responsible living,

for he is able to respond to the crisis in which he  
found himself,

a crisis he helped create.

The results are balanced books.

The results are a pleased master.

The results are new friends.

The results are words of affirmation and commendation by  
Jesus himself.

Can you imagine that?

You see, the real bite of this parable by Jesus is found in  
verse 8.

Jesus said, *“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 the  
children of light.”*

Ingenious.

Resolute.

Decisive.

Reasonable.

These are the qualities that Christ lifts up and applauds. He highlights a shrewd wheeler dealer

because he finally, finally, finally decides to re-prioritize

and take command of his life and that for which he was responsible.

He gives his all to serve his master,

and places his master's priorities above his own. [*LectioAid, P. 61, Adapted*]

### **Time has come today.**

The scandal of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ himself

is the Dishonest Steward, the shrewd manager, the crafty bookkeeper,

doing all he can to catch a napping world.

In his book, The Parables of Grace, Robert Capon said:

*As far as I am concerned, the unjust steward is nothing less*

*than the Christ figure in this parable.*

*First of all, he dies and rises, like Jesus.*

*Second, by his death and resurrection, he raises others, like Jesus.*

*But third and most important of all,*

*the unjust steward is the Christ-figure because he is a crook, like Jesus.*

*The unique contribution of this parable to our understanding of Jesus Christ*

*is its insistence that grace cannot come to the world through respectability...*

*This parable, therefore, says in story form what Jesus said in his life.*

*He was not respectable...he died as a criminal.*

*Now at last, in the light of this parable,*

*we see why he refused to be respectable:*

*he did it to catch a world that respectability could only terrify and condemn.*

*He became sin for us sinners...*

*St. Augustine said, "The cross is the devils mousetrap,*

*baited with Jesus' disreputable death."*

*And [the cross] is a mousetrap for us, too.*

*Jesus baits us criminals with his own criminality...*



*You don't like that? You think it lowers standards and threatens good order.*

*You bet it does!*

*And if you will cast your mind back,*

*you will recall that is exactly why the forces of righteousness got rid of Jesus.*

**Time has come today.**

My friends, the Gospel is scandalous.

Love is more powerful than death.

Forgiveness conquers sin.

The Prince of Peace was a pauper.

Good Friday is really, truly,  
deeply good.

An empty tomb speaks of  
the fullness of life.

God's grace transforms people like you and me into new people like you and me.

Robert Capon said, "Grace cannot come to the world through respectability."

Jesus put it another way.

He said, *“The children of this age are more shrewd  
in dealing with their own generation  
than are the children of light.”*

There can be no more business as usual.

Shrewdness for the sake of service above self is a virtue.

Be resolute; be ingenuous; be responsible.

In Christ, you are able to respond.

This is a wake-up call and there is no ignoring the alarm.

*(Even so, don't you just love to get that extra few moments  
of rest*

*before hitting the floor and the door?)*

Some of us get our rest on the Sabbath.

Some of us get them during worship on the Sabbath.

Fact: if we took everyone who nods off during a sermon

and laid them end to end on blankets from here to the  
moon

they would all be more comfortable.

Comfort, however, may need to be redefined.

Comfort is not complacency;

comfort is resting in the blessed assurance that God loves you.

God cares for you.

Moreover, God cares that you care for one another.

The brashness of this parable may overshadow the subtlety of the message:

Are you taking care of your business at the behest of the Lord?

Are you only taking care of your business at the expense of your neighbors?

What Christ calls for is not business as usual but a reassessment of priorities.

God's Word is timeless, reaching across history and space to connect with the now.

The time has come to evaluate and assess

what your priorities are, my friends, and where they reside.

We are to be faithful managers – faithful stewards, if you will

–

of the resources God provides.

An essential component of faithful stewardship  
is caring for those in need in our midst.  
Where on your agenda is caring for the least of these?

***Carpe Diem!***

The people of God are to seize the day!  
Our time has come today.

Seize the day, my friends.

Be resolute for Christ.

Be responsible for Christ.

For the sake of your Master,  
settle your accounts by taking on a life of prayer,  
a life of meditation,  
a life of active engagement with  
neighbors in need,  
a life of service above self,  
a life of shrewd accounting  
in light of the time which has come...today.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy  
Spirit. Amen!*

## **Additional Resources**

Capon, Robert, The Parables of Grace, Eerdmann's Publishing, 1988, 1991.

Harris, Glendon E., Editor, LectionAid, Kamuela, Hawaii, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1995. Pp. 61

Johnson, Marshall D., Editor, New Proclamation, Year C, 2001. Fortress Press, Minneapolis. Pp. 199-200, 203-205