

PENTECOST XVII

Whoever is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much. Luke 16: 10

The Parable of the Unjust Steward. Or the Dishonest Steward. Or, putting the best possible spin on it, the Shrewd Steward.

Nobody knows what to do with this parable. Nobody. Or, put another way, some people may think they know what to do with it. But no two agree.

One commentator says,

We might explain the tensions in the passage by imagining Luke sitting down at his Gospel writer's desk with his big pile of sayings-of-Jesus note cards, adding one maxim after another to the parable, based on loose ...connections to responsibility and money. However... we are still left to wrestle theologically with ... unlikable characters and an overabundance of interpretive glosses.

Scott Bader-Saye

Another concludes,

Luke 16:1-13 is one of the great exegetical mountains of Scripture. This bewildering parable and the positive use Jesus makes of its shifty protagonist may never be satisfactorily solved until faith is made sight.

Charles B. Cousar

One way to enter into a parable is to ask ourselves what character we'd be playing if we were in it? And there's not a very attractive answer here. Nobody's playing above board, not the master, not the steward, not the merchants. Everybody is going for their own gain. We probably don't want to bond with any of them.

So don't feel stupid if you don't get it. It's not your problem. And since greater minds than mine can't figure the parable out or agree about it, I'm not going to try.

So, let's leave the troublesome parable behind and talk about one of the maxims that might come off a *sayings-of-Jesus note card*: *Whoever is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much.*

Word seems to be getting around the parish that we're embarking on a capital campaign. I'm glad folks are hearing about it. And man, do we need it! Just look around. Turn around for a minute everyone, and look at the narthex. The peeling paint? The

falling plaster? Look up. See the plywood covering the lower third of our precious Black Madonna window?

And these are only some of the most conspicuous problems. We have unintentional air conditioning throughout the building, where stones and plaster have fallen out. Water in the basement. Tiffany stained glass windows that are buckling. We have... well, I don't want to depress you too thoroughly. Someday soon we may do a hardhat tour of the building.

Believe me... we need to begin the next phase of our building restoration. We need to do it ... last year!

But we finished one capital campaign in 2007, the basement renovation, and we all needed a break, a breathing space. We were, and are, thrilled with our basement, now bright and cheerful and busy, the pre-school tenants filling the place with life and energy all week, the Church School enjoying the space on Sundays.

Many of you were here for that last campaign, but many of you were not. We raised over \$500,000 to redo our basement, and frankly, I found that miraculous. We appealed to parishioners to double their pledges for three years – in other words, to continue to pledge at the same level to the operating fund, and to give the same amount to the capital campaign for three years.

An astonishing number of parishioners were able to do that, and some did more. And I want to tell you how some people raised their extra pledges. One of us did a triathlon and donated all his pledges to our capital campaign. One of us cancelled a trip she'd planned to Ireland, and gave that money to St. John's. Somebody re-financed her house and gave the savings to the campaign. A couple of women, inspired by the triathlon guy, ran a 10K and, likewise, donated their pledges. One of us said he would raise his pledge in exchange for free childcare from another. And so on and so on.

People were creative, and people were sacrificial, and we did it! Never have I been more inspired or humbled. Never have I been more grateful to be rector here, or prouder.

Whoever is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much.

I told the vestry the other night about an exercise on fundraising I'd been part of for a board I chair. As part of the exercise we were asked how we feel when we give money. All the responses were positive: people felt empowered, participatory, responsible, faithful, generous, and so forth. Nobody had a negative thing to say.

And I think that's true of how our last campaign went here. Some of our biggest givers to that campaign are no longer here. Some of them did not leave happy. But I never heard of anyone regretting or resenting the part they'd played in helping us reach our goal. It was all for the greater glory of God, and I think no one begrudged that.

Our success felt to me like an affirmation of the Scriptural promise, *all things are possible with God*.

The next phase, the upcoming phase, of our campaign will not be as plainly and visibly gratifying as the basement renovation. Much of the money we raise will go to repointing the east façade- the tower side, of the church. Mortar isn't sexy. But I was talking the other day with a woman doing research for a diocesan capital campaign, and she talked about one minister she'd worked with who kept a large building stone on his desk. Whenever he made an ask for his campaign, he'd pick up the heavy stone and demand, "what if this fell on a child's head?" That's about the situation we're in – no kidding!

A building needs assessment is being carried out currently. That will allow us to apply for grants, and will help us prioritize the tasks ahead. It will also suggest the scope of the campaign.

You will be hearing more about the campaign in the weeks and months to come. You will be asked –and the asking begins right now– to consider prayerfully how you can contribute to our efforts with your time, your talent, and your treasure/

We are blessed with the faithful and generous leadership of Tom Ward, who is heading up this campaign. He needs help on his committee. Please speak to him if you believe you can participate. And, please, consider what particular skills and gifts you may have to offer, in addition to financial commitment.

We can do this, my dear friends. We must, and we can. I have faith. I have faith in all of you, because of your own faithfulness. *Whoever is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much.*

Alleluia! Amen