

Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time C - Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant

September 21, 2025

Today, we are presented with perhaps the most confusing parable of Luke's! Two questions: Why is the steward who steals from his master apparently doing something good? What is the "dishonest wealth" that Jesus wants us to use? We will attempt to make sense of the parable, knowing that even today there are differing opinions as to what it means. The steward knows he's mismanaged his master's goods. Facing dismissal, he will shortly be out on the street, dishonoured, and without a means to support himself. For a short period of time, he still has the authority to reduce the debts of others. Quickly, he decides to gain the goodwill of the many debtors to his master by reducing their debts as soon as possible. What is clear is that he is not personally generous. He cares not for others but rather only for himself. He is not merciful; rather, he is cunning. Because of his swiftness, cunning, and his decisiveness, Jesus points out that "the children of this world are more prudent... than are the children of light" (Luke 16:8). The steward is literally stealing from his master, yet Jesus says, "The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness" (Luke 16:8). How can this be good? Before we address this, we need to talk now about the meaning of dishonest wealth.

The way to understand "dishonest wealth" is to look at the translation. It can mean "unjust wealth". To be in possession of some type of wealth does not mean we legally have a right to it. A person could, for various reasons, such as finding a lost purse full of money, be in possession of something that they did not earn, did not purchase, or deserve. A person like this could be described as having "unjust wealth". It means having something that isn't yours. Here is the point: we are all in possession of "unjust wealth" because everything we have and are comes from God. Our wealth isn't just money. It's a whole host of other, more important things, such as:

- The gift of life itself.
- God's unconditional love.
- The air we breathe.
- The food we eat.
- The grace we have received.
- The forgiveness of our sins.

All of these are different forms of "wealth", and we cannot lay claim to them by our own right. With this new understanding, we can now piece together the meaning of this parable.

We didn't earn our life, our health, God's grace, forgiveness, or salvation. These are gifts, loaned by God. Likewise, all the material resources in the world are given by God for the good of all. Therefore, we are all stewards of whatever material wealth we have. But, like the steward, we're tempted to squander them on ourselves—buying fleeting pleasures, chasing status, or hoarding for security. This brings us to a sobering truth: we often misuse God's gifts. Every dollar spent on unnecessary luxuries, every hour wasted in selfish pursuits, is a missed opportunity to serve. We are tempted to withhold love from others, to hold grudges, to not forgive, to live selfishly, and to hurt others. Jesus urges us to use our gifts for eternal purposes. The lesson isn't to be dishonest but to be wise with what's entrusted to us. This is what Pope Francis refers to as 'Christian craftiness', living as lambs among wolves or be prudent as serpents and simple as doves. We only have a short amount of time to live on this earth! These words of Jesus now can make sense. He is saying in this parable, "Make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, they may welcome you into the eternal dwellings" (Luke 16:9). The "friends" are those we serve—God and others—through our love and generosity. Let's be stewards who hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant," as we enter God's eternal dwellings, our true home. Today's parable challenges us to consider how we use God's gifts. Everything we possess—wealth, time, talents—belongs to God, entrusted to us for His purposes.

In the final scene of the movie *Schindler's List*, Oskar Schindler, surrounded by the Jews he saved, weeps. During the course of the film, Schindler realized that his immense wealth could be used to save Jewish men, women, and children. He hires them for his factories and seeks any reason or pretext to save the Jews from the Nazi concentration camps. At the end of the movie, now that the war is over, he recognizes he has saved many. But he weeps, because he could have saved more! He looks at his car, his gold pin, and realizes every penny spent elsewhere could have been used to save another life. "This car—ten people," he laments. "This pin—two more." His wealth, once a symbol of status, now screams of missed opportunities to serve others. Like Schindler, we're entrusted with God's wealth—not ours. The parable today calls us to be shrewd with God's gifts, investing in eternal treasures. Will we look back with regret, or will we use what's entrusted to us to build God's kingdom, knowing nothing is truly ours? As the saying goes, 'Money is an instrument that can buy everything but happiness, and purchases a ticket to every place but heaven.'

One of the saints who most exemplified Christ was St. Francis. He is known for his poverty and his stigmata. His witness can help us today understand this difficult parable. Saint Francis of Assisi came from a wealthy family. He wasted a lot of his family's wealth on lavish parties and fine clothes. His sinful lifestyle was something he never forgot after his subsequent conversion. His life changed slowly after a series of misfortunes led him to rethink his life. Dreams and inspirations in prayer led him to abandon all his family's wealth. Francis recognized that nothing he had was his; all of it was "dishonest wealth". Francis renounced all he had received from his earthly father and began a life of poverty. Standing in Assisi's square, he gave away his possessions, even his garments, recognizing they were God's. Every coin he'd spent on himself could have fed the poor or comforted the sick. From then on, Francis used every resource—time, energy, and even his tattered robe—for God's glory, rebuilding churches and embracing lepers. His life embodied true stewardship. He used "dishonest wealth" to build God's kingdom. Worldly wealth is not being judged negatively, but we are told to use it wisely and to share it (give alms) to win heavenly allies who can intercede for us when that wealth eventually fails us. We are reminded that enslavement to money is a form of idolatry and it can be avoided only if we hold it lightly and share it, giving God priority in our lives.

When Christ came to earth with the mission to save us, he showed us the limitless love of God. Jesus poured himself out for us to the last drop of blood. He held nothing back. There is a virtue that encompasses this limitless love. It's called magnanimity. It literally means to "have a great soul". It is perhaps the most Christ-like of virtues that we humans can strive for. This week, we need to seek out an unconditional and measureless love. It means not to hold back, to give even when it hurts. The concept of "dishonest wealth" allows us to recognize that everything we have—wealth, time, talents—comes from God. Our possessions, our talents, and our accomplishments have their deepest origin in God's grace. This means that being grateful to God should be a consistent attitude in our lives. People who are grateful are people who are simply more compassionate, more kind, and more honest. On the contrary, how selfish we can be, and how arrogant, when we forget about this truth. Gratitude transforms our lives, reshapes our perspective, and places us before God. It is the Christian way of life. Let's use our "dishonest wealth" wisely to build the kingdom of God and make it our gateway to heaven.