

## **Think Carefully**

Parables of Jesus: Part 7 “Think Carefully”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – October 3, 2021

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**Readings:** Luke 16:1-13

**Reflection:** Psalm 99

**Greeting:** Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

**Prayer:** Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 99

*The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he! Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Extol the LORD our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he! Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called on his name. They cried to the LORD, and he answered them. He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept his decrees, and the statutes that he gave them. O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. Extol the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy. (Psalm 99 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 99 and we hear of God’s power. We hear about how holy and good the Lord is. That we should praise God and speak about the help he has given. That we should follow the path that God has given us. How do we seek God’s forgiveness? How has God enabled you to help others? How can we share in the hope of Christ’s redeeming grace?

**Prayer:** O God, teach us to listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to use what you have given us to do good. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus’ name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Luke chapter 16 verses 1 through 13.

*Jesus also said to the disciples, "A certain rich man heard that his household manager was wasting his estate. He called the manager in and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give me a report of your administration because you can no longer serve as my manager.' "The household manager said to himself, What will I do now that my master is firing me as his manager? I'm not strong enough to dig and too proud to beg. I know what I'll do so that, when I am removed from my management position, people will welcome me into their houses. "One by one, the manager sent for each person who owed his master money. He said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil.' The manager said to him, 'Take your contract, sit down quickly, and write four hundred fifty gallons.' Then the manager said to another, 'How much do you owe?' He said, 'One thousand bushels of wheat.' He said, 'Take your contract and write eight hundred.' "The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted cleverly. People who belong to this world are more clever in dealing with their peers than are people who belong to the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to make friends for yourselves so that when it's gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal homes. "Whoever is faithful with little is also faithful with much, and the one who is dishonest with little is also dishonest with much. If you haven't been faithful with worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? If you haven't been faithful with someone else's property, who will give you your own? No household servant can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."*  
(Luke 16:1-13 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

As we've noted before, sometimes parables are not as straightforward as we would expect. And if we're not careful, we can learn the wrong lesson. Today's parable is one of those. We have to scratch the surface to understand what Jesus is actually saying. In our reading for today, Jesus tells a parable about a rich man and his household manager. And the rich man decides that he wants to review the books. Apparently, he has not heard good things about his manager. And so, he's going to be letting him go. He tells him to get everything in order. He wants to have a look before he's fired. The manager can see the writing on the wall, and he knows things are not going to be easy for him. He's a white-collar guy. He's too proud to beg. He's not strong enough to dig. Panhandling and manual labor are out. He's got to figure out a way he can take care of himself in the future. So, he comes up with a plan. He starts calling on everybody that owes the rich man money. He sits them down in front of him and he goes, "alright, tell me what you owe." And when they do, he says, "Okay. Let's cut that amount down." And one by one he has people come through and change their amounts so that they owe less. Now, I want to pause here and note that we should all know this is a pretty dishonest

business practice. With a wink and a nod, he's changing how much is owed to his master. What happens to the manager? The rich man, his master, commends him. He commends his dishonest manager for his cleverness. Now, this is where we have to pause and say "what?"

A cursory glance might tell us being dishonest is good. Not quite what Jesus is going for here. In this story, we have to take into account what the point is. And the point isn't the dishonesty. The point isn't fraud. The point isn't poor business practices. The point is being clever. This is where it helps to think carefully. The master isn't saying, "Hey, I like your dishonesty." He isn't saying "Hey, I like the way you do business." He knows he's been cheated. The manager would have had full control over managing who owes what and managing the debt. Whatever account the manager gives is the account that the rich man is going to have to live with. What comes in when we think carefully about this is the why. Why did he do this? Why is he being commended? And Jesus helps to spell this out. He notes that the guy is shrewd. He's fast on his feet. He had to plan for the future, so he decided to figure out what the best way forward for him was so that he would have a future. So, he makes friends. He uses wealth to make friends so that he will be accepted into people's homes. So that people will go, "Hey, I remember you. Man, you saved me a lot of money. Why don't you come over for dinner on Saturday?" And there we get the real message. The man didn't cheat to amass wealth for himself so that he could become rich on his own and then use it to be like the rich master. He decided, "Nope. The only way forward for me is if I make some friends and I get some people in my life that are going to help me in the future". And Jesus notes, that this guy knows what he's doing. And that maybe we should be a little more like him. Not being dishonest, not being unfaithful, but thinking ahead and being smart about it.

The manager decided to think carefully and implemented a course for where he wanted to be in the future. And we can connect this to the kingdom of God. Where do we want to be in the future? Still thinking about worldly wealth? Or do we want to be invited to the kingdom? Do we want to be invited to the table? Jesus points this out to the disciples saying "use worldly wealth to make friends for yourselves so that when it's gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal homes." It's important that we note that this is about planning for the future. We can't let ourselves be tricked into thinking it is saying dishonesty or cheating people are good. Not once does Jesus say that anyone commends him for being dishonest. Not once does he say cheat people. It's quite the opposite. We should use what we've got to help others. Because, in the end, that's really what's highlighted about this dishonest manager. Not that he was dishonest. That's not the good thing. But he used what was at his disposal to help others so that he could make friends and secure his future.

When Jesus goes on to talk about this, he talks about how those who are faithful with a little are also faithful with much and those who are dishonest with a little are dishonest with much. And to Christ, wealth is a little thing. Because this becomes a question of how we use our resources. Who do we serve? Are we out making money during the week, taking advantage of others, and doing all that we can to amass wealth, and then showing up to church

on Sunday and praying to God that we be good people and do the right thing, and then go back to work cheat people during the week? No, if we are dishonest with how we handle money, if we are dishonest with how we handle the resources we have, are we going to be honest with the other aspects of our lives? If we are dishonest with others, it's hard to say that we're going to be honest with God. And Jesus lays it out about as simple as we can get. You cannot serve God and wealth. Now, this calls us once again to think carefully about what's being said here. Is Jesus saying you cannot be wealthy? No. Is Jesus saying making money is bad? No. People have to make a living. What is being said, though, is that how you use that money is going to determine your future, both in this life and in the next.

The call of this parable, as I see it, is saying we should chase the kingdom the way that many chase wealth. People who are trying to run a business are shrewd, and they're careful with how they do things. They try to make sure that people want to come back to their business. They want to maximize profits by making good use of the available resources. Why aren't we like that with matters of faith? Wanting to use our resources carefully to help others and inspire love. When we deal with people on matters of faith, how well do we use our resources out and help? A business will do all they can to get the message out so they can make money. Why don't we use the resources we have for building up the Kingdom with the same passion that people have for getting wealthy? Inspiring others to do good, to repent, to believe. And that's why Jesus notes the shrewdness of those of the earth compared to the children of light. People worried about worldly wealth figure out how to amass it and they plan for the future. They think carefully about their business decisions. Are we that careful with our spiritual choices? Do we think about using our wealth to help others? Do we use our resources to bless others? Do we build the kingdom by loving our neighbor, using the resources that we have?

That's the focus here. Are we using the resources we have in a way that honors God? Are we doing things in a way that emulates Christ? I used to see those WWJD things all over the place, asking "What Would Jesus Do?" But how often do we look at our bank accounts and ask that question? How often do we open our wallets or our checkbooks, pull out our debit card, and think "what would Jesus do?" This parable doesn't tell us to be dishonest and to be deceitful. But instead shows us that if we are not using all that you have at your disposal, building up your place in the kingdom of heaven, then you're just wasting it. If you're not thinking about ways that you can honor God in what you do with all that you have, you're waste wasting it. Here's this guy, dishonest, not even repentant about his sins. We can learn from him because he's thinking about the future, about what comes next. And he wants to make sure he's welcomed in. And that's what we need to do. We need to stop and think carefully, so that we are using all that we have at our disposal to build up not fleeting wealth, not passing things, but building up love and friendship, building up kindness and mercy. We use what we have for Kingdom building. So that we build up the body of Christ, inviting others in, helping others along our journey. I want to think carefully and ask "Am I serving wealth? Just building up my

things? Or am I serving God and building the kingdom for a better tomorrow? For an eternal tomorrow?" And ask "Which one do I serve?" Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Parables of Jesus**

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

October 10th – *Wandering Away* – Luke 15:11-24

We take a look at the first of two lost brothers. The first is lost from wandering away from the path.

### **Prayer List**

|                              |                            |                                 |                                |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Rev Charliam Renner          | Bishop Frank Beard         | Our Conference                  | Our Healthcare Workers         |
| Patti Corder and the Greenup | Ambulance Crew             | Angie Veach                     | Eric Veach                     |
| Cathy Devall                 | Brock McMorris             | Ed & Verna Titus                | Henry Catey                    |
| Jake Kiser                   | Cindy Cisney               | Nancy Hoke                      | Don Wells                      |
| Tricia Adkins                | Don Stewart                | Ronnie Winstead                 | Annie McMorris                 |
| Dwight Parsons               | Lauren Stewart             | Phyllis Gable                   | Sage Martin                    |
| Dalton McFarland             | Darrell Quick              | Ruth Ann Finley                 | Sandy Starwalt                 |
| Allen Goebel & Family        | Jodie Bunch                | Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach | Richard Durham                 |
| Kathy Hanks                  | Wayne Carrell              | Gary & Mary Winterrowd          | Leo Smith                      |
| Bonnie Hite                  | Lavada Markwell            | Greg Williams                   | Eloise Buffenmeyer             |
| Martha Roberts               | Charlie & Charlotte Baxter | Paul Schulte                    | Family of Herbert "Tip" Carlen |
| Family of Andy Shull         | Family of Brent Pitcher    | Family of Allan Dunne           | Family of Bill Hayden          |
| Gene Laymon                  | John Blade                 | Family of Emily Jobe            | Family of John Kinzel          |

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

[cdstmichael@outlook.com](mailto:cdstmichael@outlook.com)

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

\* Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.