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"Giving"

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1 Luke 16:1-13 | Timothy 2:1-7

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 8:18-9:1

Jeremiah's warnings have gone unheeded. Destruction has come to Israel. This morning he cries out for healing, cries out to the Lord who alone can bring a healing balm. Hear the word of the Lord from Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 16:1-10

Unlike the passage we studied last week, in this morning's passage the Pharisees aren't confronting Jesus. They are standing off to the side watching, listening. Jesus tells this parable to his disciples. On this occasion there were more than just the 12. A large number of followers are gathered around. He tells them about a steward who handled the business affairs of a wealthy man. Please stand if you are able for the reading of the gospel from Luke 16:1-13.

Let us pray,

Thank you Lord for this your word. Speak to us through what we have heard this morning so that we might be faithful and effective servants. Bring to our minds ways that we can make a difference in our world.

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There's an old story about a young man in Montana who bought a horse from a farmer for \$100. The farmer agreed to deliver the horse the next day. However when the next day arrived, the farmer reneged on his promise.

"I'm afraid the horse has died," he explained.

The young man said, "Well, then give me my money back."

The farmer said, "Can't do that. I spent it already."

The young man thought for a moment and said, "Ok, then, just bring me the dead horse."

The farmer asked, "What you going to do with a dead horse?"

The young man said, "I'm going to raffle it off."

The farmer said, "You can't raffle off a dead horse!"

The young man said, "Sure I can. Watch me. I just won't tell anybody he's dead."

A month later, the farmer met up with the young man and asked, "What happened with that dead horse?"

The young man said, "I raffled him off. I sold 500 tickets at two dollars apiece and made a profit of \$998..."

The farmer said, "Didn't anyone complain?"

The young man said, "Just the guy who won. So I gave him his two dollars back."

There's something about a con man that captures the imagination. 1).

Jesus' parable is about a man with a similar kind of wily disposition. He, too, was something of a con man. The man has heard, "Your Fired." As he is cleaning out his desk he calls in his master's debtors who had outstanding accounts, and he

starts slashing. The first one gets his bill cut in half. The second one didn't get the 50%off discount, he only got 20%. He forgives the debts that are not his to forgive, plays favorites in order to gain friends in the process. The surprise ending is that when the man's former boss finds out he commends him. The boss who fired him commends him for "sticking it to the man" even though the man is....himself!

So what is Jesus' point? Well, there's not just one point; there are three. (There's a reason that preacher's deliver 3 point sermons. We learned it from Jesus.)

First, Jesus explains the wise use of worldly wealth. Do you know that one of the wisest things you can do with your money is give it away? It's not the only thing but it's one of the wisest things. Why? Because you can't take it with you. When I used to work at Cokesbury Bookstore we had a book with the title "I've never seen a hearse towing a UHaul."

When it comes to using our worldly wealth...when it comes to giving and asking folks to give, so many times the church has gone about it in the wrong way or with the wrong logic. We come up with all these reasons why we should give.

1. Some try the business approach. We give because we need 5% more money this year over last year.
2. Some try flattery. You have the means, only YOU can give this amount.
3. Some try guilt trips. "You are wealthier than 95% of the world's population.
4. Some try payback. You will get back more than you gave.
5. Some try ego. We will name the building after you if you give.
6. Some try magical thinking. If you give this amount as a seed God will bless you with much more.

We give every reason except the right reason. We give because Christ gave. We give because we are not truly human until we become a giver. We give to keep grace alive within us. We give because it reflects the nature of God who gives. We give till it hurts because it hurts even more not to give. We give lest we develop "cirrhosis of the giver".

Jesus has a very strange way of making this point. The dishonest steward gains friends by cooking the books...and his master then commends him! This guy may have gotten fired, but it got him fired up. He did everything he could to make the most of a bad situation. Is Jesus saying we are to take a man who is dishonest to the core as our model? The answer is, Yes! Is he is our model because he's dishonest and a scoundrel? NO! He's our model because he used his resources. It's not his actions that Jesus commends. It is simply that he acted.

This brings us to Jesus' second point. Trustworthiness is measured by character and it is measured in the smallest of degrees. I think Jesus speaks for all us

when he says that the person who can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much. Watch how someone handles the little things and you'll know how they handle the big things of life.

I used to be a part of a Friday morning prayer group around a friend's kitchen table. In the course of praying and reading a passage of scripture one of the guys told this story on himself.

In the morning he makes coffee for himself and his wife. He knows how much creamora she likes in her coffee and how much he likes in his. As he was shaking it out he could see that he was going to run out and not have enough for both hers and his coffee. Should he short hers so he could have some in his or should he give hers what she liked and forgo his own? In an instant he chose to give it all to hers. To his amazement, when he did there somehow was enough for his as well.

Faithful in little. Faithful in much. Faithful in cremora, faithful in amora. That's the principle. That's the acid test for character. If we're honest in the little things it will enable us to be honest in the big things. If we are faithful in the little things we can be faithful in the big things. All temptations to take another drink are little. All money you have been entrusted with is little, compared to true riches. If you have not been trustworthy with worldly wealth, who will trust you with eternal wealth?

That's Jesus' question for you and me. My friends, all the resources that have been placed in our care here on earth are but small tests. How we use earthly things tells our Lord how we will use spiritual things, what he calls True Riches.

What in the world are "True Riches?" What are the things that count for eternity? How about the children you nurture, the home you keep, the job you work, the money you make, the friends you enjoy, the neighbor you know, the stranger you meet? You have been entrusted with these. Have you been found trustworthy? Will you be responsible to these earthly riches? If so then you will have true riches in heaven.

The family and friends and resources we have been entrusted with are only temporary. God is eternal. Don't make the mistake of putting your trust in the things of this world. I will not be here forever and neither will you. What we do while we are here has potential to live on in the lives that we touch. What we do while we are on earth even have an effect on our eternal life. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount over and over again Jesus said, "Blessed are you when you are persecuted for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven." There are heavenly rewards. We can't experience them now, but we have faith and hope that we will.

Jesus third point is that we can't have it both ways. We can't dedicate our life to

true riches and false riches. We can't serve the God of eternity and the god of this world, which IS.....money money money....

When it comes to money there at least 3 principles that almost always come into play:

1. Every time you lend money to a friend you damage his memory. (he forgets)
2. When a guy says "It's not the money but the principle of the thing," it's the money.
3. Before borrowing money from a friend, decide which you need more.

Billy Graham said it all: "When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost."

One day a certain old, rich man of a miserable disposition visited a rabbi, who took the rich man by the hand and led him to a window. "Look out there," he said. The rich man looked into the street. "What do you see?" asked the rabbi. "I see men, women, and children," answered the rich man. Again the rabbi took him by the hand and this time led him to a mirror. "Now what do you see?" "Now I see myself," the rich man replied.

Then the rabbi said, "Behold, in the window there is glass, and in the mirror there is glass. But the glass of the mirror is covered with a little silver, and no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others, and see only yourself."

Whenever your devotion to money and material things causes you to be self-centered, you in essence deny God's intention for your life.

Sometimes God will do to us what the boss in the parable did to this steward. He will strip us down to the very core of our existence to help us discover who we really are. He will bring us to a crossroad in life where we will be forced to say, "To dig I am not able, to beg I am ashamed." There God will reveal to us who we are.

A church member came to his pastor's study one day. The pastor could see that the man looked deeply troubled. The man said, "Pastor, I need to talk. I feel so empty, so dried up inside, I'm scared." His voice began to quiver just a bit. He said "Pastor, I have just come from the doctor's office, and he told me that I have only six months at best to live. After I left the office, I realized that I have no spiritual resources, no inner strength to cope with this. There is nothing to fall back on, to lean against. Many people would be surprised to hear me say that, for I have made lots of money, and people think I am a success not only at making money, but at being a strong, powerful person."

He then fell quiet, and the pastor waited in silence for him to go on. Finally the man said, "You know I'm poor in the things that count the most. I see it now. I've put my faith in the wrong things, and the truth is I am destitute, spiritually destitute. I could pick up the phone and call any bank in Houston and borrow any

amount of money to do whatever I wanted to. Just on my name, Reverend, just on my name! Do you understand? I could borrow it on my name only."

The man then leaned forward and put his head in his hands, and said softly through tears, "I guess there are some things you can't buy or borrow."

This man's material bank was full to overflowing, but his spiritual bank was empty.2)

When it comes to a question of whom we will serve, we must be single minded in our resolve that we will live our lives not to serve money but to serve God. Jesus is saying that we are in deep trouble if money has first place in our lives. Money is a nice servant but a terrible master. Because at the end of our life, the two words we do not want to hear from OUR Master are, "You're fired." The words we want to hear are, "Well done Thou good and faithful servant. We will hear that is indeed our standard of living is informed by our standard of ... giving.

Let's Pray. Dear Lord, hear us now as we come before you. We thank you for the true riches of this life, which are a foretaste of the true riches to come in heaven. We thank you for our faith in what we cannot see, our hope for what is to come and for love which sustains us till those things are a reality and will remain when faith is realized and hope is fulfilled. We thank you for the treasures that we can take with us: memories of loved ones, sacrifices of others, deeds of kindness, acts of mercy. We thank you for the free gift of eternal life, given not earned, received not acquired.

We thank you for the blessings of family and friends, good food and shelter. At the same time we pray for those who have lost all their worldly goods because of storms, and for the survivors who have lost loved ones.

We pray for those who have lost everything through manmade storms of war and for an end to the genocide an end to the suicide bombings and the terrorism and the reasons behind these desperate acts of violence.

Hear us as we pray for \_\_\_\_\_

Hear us as we pray for those to whom we have entrusted the authority of government. We pray for their health, that they may be able to withstand the pressures of office. We pray for those who advise them. That they may be given the wisdom required for each circumstance. We pray for the families, loved ones, and friends of our leaders, that they may be supportive in the midst of the burdens of public life.

You have taught us this morning that we can serve only one. We commit our allegiance to you alone. May all that we do be to your glory, so that one day we may hear the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant.

1) ChristianGlobe Illustrations by King Duncan