

Sermon on Stewardship Un. Chapel

Sunday January 14, 2018

At 7 a.m.

Text: St, Luke chapter 16: 1-13.

Topic: The Clever Steward

Prayer: Heavenly Father we give you thanks that you have called us to be your disciples, and to continue to be your faithful stewards. As such we pray that your Holy Spirit will strengthen us to remain faithful and to serve one another and You to the end of our lives.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight O Lord my strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction (a) Thanks as always to my colleague and friend Canon Garth Minott for the invitation to share with you on the subject of Stewardship at the beginning of the New Year.

I understand that a regular word used by some young people when there is the repetition on a subject like this is, “boring.” Well, “as people of God we acknowledge Jesus as the revelation and the answer for our hurting world.” We therefore ask ourselves this question: “How can we proclaim this good news and share it with those who may need to hear?” This cannot be boring news for longtime followers of Jesus, is it? Of course not!

We have a story to tell this our nation and elsewhere. Effective disciples and obedient stewards of Jesus must be prepared to be transformed.

Introduction (b) I invite you to listen to a summary of this challenging parable: **“The Clever Steward.”** St. Luke chapter 16: 1-13. It’s application to each person’s life requires an open mind. Here goes.

John Killinger professor of preaching and literature at Vanderbilt Divinity School Nashville, Tenn, USA summarizes the parable like this: It seems more appropriately to follow chapter 14, with its warnings about the radical demands on those who would enter the kingdom. This passage is directed too towards the disciples.

The point of the parable is the shrewdness with which ordinary business persons act when confronted with a crisis situation, and **an exhortation to the disciples to act similarly in the face of their nation’s spiritual crisis.** (How can we Christian stewards act similarly in the midst of the many crises with which we are confronted?)

This steward is a middle manager who oversees his employer’s tenant farms. When word of his improper handling of affairs reached the employer, the employer gave him notice of dismissal. Quickly taking stock of himself at the present stage of his life, the steward decided that he was too old to work in the fields and too proud to beg in the streets. So he decided to do something

to cushion his fall. Before his employment fully expired he went to his employer's tenants. The rent on one tenant's property had been fixed at one hundred measures of olive oil part of which probably went to the steward himself. Using his authority to fix rents the steward made a friend of the man by reducing the rent by half. Going to another tenant he used the same tactic. Probably there were others who were not mentioned for the sake of the parable's economy. The steward was clearly making friends who would take him in when his work terminated.

As a businessman the employer might have regretted the steward's lack of trust worthiness, yet he could not but admire his ingenuity and praise him for it.

What was Jesus' comment? It was that these business men are often wiser than the followers of God! How does that apply to us the stewards of today? Let's listen to

Verse 9 of the parable. Jesus went on to say: "And so I tell you: make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home."

What is the conclusion from the parable? It is that like the steward we should take every opportunity to create friendships with our money or profits, thus earning an eternal merit?

Verses 10-12 suggests to us that if we do not behave in this manner with the world's goods, God can surely not entrust to us the greater spiritual riches of his kingdom.

So as God's stewards we are called to be trust worthy.

The final verse, verse 13, links the whole business again to the call to radical commitment in chapter 14, because it restates the importance of wholehearted allegiance.

Hear verse 13: "No servant can be the slave of two masters; such a servant will hate one and love the other or serve both God and money." (See what scamming has caused in our island and abroad?)

Surely, as God's stewards if we love God, we will use our money for spiritual purposes. But, if we love money, we cannot use God to further our business situations. God will not be a party to our selfish designs.

In the light of this parable and its interpretation, let me suggest that:

We are being called as Christian Stewards to face "some hard realities." Here is one such reality.

In Luke chapter 14, 25-35 Jesus challenged his disciples and would be followers who listened to his preaching, his teaching, and viewed his healings to face the reality that:

"None of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have."

The reality then and now is: discipleship is not easy. in fact, 'it would demand and demands every ounce of our loyalty.

Jesus told them that being a disciple is like: (quote) “bearing your own cross- committing yourself to the gallows, to execution, to death among strangers.”

Count the cost, he warned. Even a builder does that before erecting a tower. A king does that before going to war.

Is that what you are committing yourselves to be in this new Year- a disciple of Jesus Christ- yes a true steward of his? What will it cost us?

A true steward must commit all to Christ, time, talent, treasure or resources. Such a steward must be accountable to God for gifts given to her or him.

We must face the hard reality as well that: “To be a disciple of Jesus be prepared to go through times of stress and danger.

In applying this passage to himself John Killinger prays like this: *Lord, these are bracing words. They sting my conscience like nettles, like thousands of needles of fire. What kind of disciple am I? Could I follow to the death, or am I a disciple of convenience? How selfishly I have heard the Gospel. Forgive me, O suffering One and help me to increase the measure of my devotion, lest I betray you in a moment of forgetfulness or an hour of pressure. Amen.*

One of our realities this new year is to write a brief prayer like this one done by John Killinger re our discipleship commitment.

What then is Jesus' challenge to us as Stewards and disciples of his?

He challenges us to live another way. Arising from this parable, why did Jesus use a "bad" man as a good example? For all his dishonesty, the steward demonstrated three virtues for followers of Jesus to emulate.

- (a) Like the steward Christians should be careful and shrewd. God has entrusted resources to Christians as individuals and communities. We are to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves." (Matt. 10:16), keeping in mind God's priorities and purposes.
- (b) Jesus also challenges his disciples, and in extension us to follow the example of the steward of connecting with people. In verse 8 of chapter 16 Jesus notes that the sons of this world are more shrewd to dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." The Scribes and Pharisees on the other hand distinguished themselves from the Publicans and sinners of their generation. How much are we prepared to relate as a church community to the youth of this generation; the gender issues of this age and the marginalized? For Jesus, we stewards ought to cultivate relationships with a particular purpose. i.e. to show forth Christ as Lord.

- (c) Our Lord challenges us to have the same sense of urgency that motivated the clever steward. Like the steward in Luke's story we will have to give an accounting of ourselves. We are stewards of time, energy, money and other finite resources in this life---all gifts from a gracious God. How shall we respond to such generosity? The response that Jesus seeks, and that the Spirit enables, is the urgent and unflagging determination to proclaim the gospel faithfully, through our words and our lives.

By what power will we be able to bring (as Jesus said) "good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind; set free the oppressed; and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people?" The answer is:

- (d) When we renew our covenant with **God our Redeemer.**

Our lessons to day refer to baptism by water, and baptism by the Holy Spirit. We are reminded that Baptism is a sacred act of mystical union in which the baptized are united with the Holy Spirit. We are told that sometimes Christians wonder whether the Holy Spirit is somehow inside them or perhaps visits them in particular moments.

In the Acts passage chapter 19:1-7- Paul's understanding is that Christians baptized in Jesus' name are now "in" the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit

holds the power, not us. Our efforts as disciples/stewards to pursue God's will and accomplish spiritual tasks do not depend for their success on our occasional appeals to the Holy Spirit for assistance. Our successful efforts depend on whether we recall our baptism and our uniting with the Holy Spirit, which is God's active presence in the world. The question is, not whether the Holy Spirit dwells in us. But whether we dwell in the Holy Spirit. Only thus will we the people of God be able to face a hostile world with courage and confidence.

Conclusion:

Having become adopted sons and daughters of God at baptism, Jesus is our brother. He now calls us to follow him.

We read the stories of Samuel and the calling of Jesus' disciples in John and it's easy to feel jealous. God spoke so directly into their lives that they should have had, it seems to us, full and unwavering confidence in their calling. Didn't they have an unfair spiritual advantage over us?

In this age of advanced technology which seems to have enslaved this generation, how can we get through to them with the message peace on earth good will to all? As you think on all that:

Just imagine what happens to us when Jesus calls us to follow him. He knows us and the secret of our hearts. He knows our weaknesses, inadequacies and doubts. Yet he invites us into an intimate relationship with God by becoming his disciples.

John's Gospel emphasizes the decision of accepting or rejecting Jesus. Nathanael, an Israelite without deceit chooses to accept Jesus and receives his promise of seeing "greater things than these" and "heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

During my holiday break I decided to spend most of the time reading the Bible, praying and asking God to reveal to me what he would have me do. One of the issues I reflected on was the crisis between the USA and North and South Korea. What can I do I asked myself? The immediate answer was; pray for the leaders of the nations. Let them realize Lord, I said, that they are stewards and they have a responsibility to care for those they lead and accountability for lives destroyed under their watch. In a day or two after we heard on the news that North and South Korea are meeting and will cooperate in sporting activities.

You know sisters and brothers, Jesus calls us to follow, and we decide. Following Jesus requires a

daily commitment; our obedience brings transformation and reconciliation. We follow with our hearts and our lives, settling only for God's fulness of life.

In the light of all that has been said let us be assured that Jesus is calling us right now with the invitation: "Follow me." What is your response? Can it be in the words of the hymn writer:

Jesus calls us/me, our the tumult
Of our /my life's wild restless sea,
Day by day his sweet voice soundeth
Saying, Christian! Follow me.

As of old Apostles heard it
By the Galilean sea
Turn from home and toil and kindred
Leaving all for his dear sake.

Jesus calls us, by Thy mercies
Savior make us hear Thy call.
Give our hearts to Thine obedience.
Serve and love Thee best of all.

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.