

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

28th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 113)*

One: Praise the Lord, O servants of the Lord!

All: **Blessed be the name of the Lord
from this time on and forevermore.**

One: From the rising of the sun to its setting
the name of the Lord is to be praised.

All: **Blessed be the name of the Lord
from this time on and forevermore.**

***OPENING HYMN** “In My Life” GtG 468

1. **In my life, Lord,
be glorified; be glorified.
In my life, Lord,
be glorified today.**
2. **In our song, Lord,
be glorified; be glorified.
In our song, Lord,
be glorified today.**
3. **In your church, Lord,
be glorified; be glorified.
In your church, Lord,
be glorified today.**
4. **In your world, Lord,
be glorified; be glorified.
In your world, Lord,
be glorified today.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of mercy, we come to you with penitent hearts seeking forgiveness. We have been quick to learn the ways of the world: to seek power over others, always to be on the lookout for self, to make decisions based on greed; but we have been slow in learning the teachings of Jesus: to love mercy, to lose oneself in service to others, to be forgiving, and to love you and our neighbors as ourselves. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, we pray, that we may be cleansed of our sins and find what it means to be new persons in Christ. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from I John 1 and Romans 8)*

One: If we say that we have no sin,
we deceive ourselves,
and the truth is not in us.

**All: But if we confess our sin,
God who is faithful, washes us clean.**

One: Beloved of God,
the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.
Nothing you have done, nothing you will ever do
is enough to separate you from the love of God
made known in Jesus Christ.

I declare in the name of the risen Christ
that our sin is forgiven and our lives are made new.

All: Thanks be to God!

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: And also with you.

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Luke 16:1-13

LUKE 16:1-13 (various)

¹ Jesus also said to the disciples, "There was a certain rich man who had a household manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his possessions. ² So he called him in and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' ³ The

manager said to himself, 'What will I do now that my master is firing me as his manager? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I know what I will do so that, when I am removed from my management position, people will welcome me into their houses.' ⁵ 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?' ⁶ He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write fifty.' ⁷ Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and write eighty.' ⁸ The master commended the 'inappropriate' manager because he acted cleverly. For the children of this age are more clever in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. ⁹ I tell you, use 'inappropriate' wealth to make friends for yourselves so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. ¹⁰ Whoever is faithful with little is also faithful with much, and the one who is 'inappropriate' with little is also 'inappropriate' with much. ¹¹ If, then, you have not been faithful with the 'inappropriate' wealth, who will entrust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No 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."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Lessons from the 'Inappropriate' Manager" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Words used to describe this parable:

"Baffling" "Challenging" "Complicated" "Difficult"
"Disturbing" "Shocking" "Offensive" "Odd"

Almost as many words as that used to describe the manager himself. Is he "dishonest"? Is he "shrewd"? Is he "prudent"? Is he "judicious"? Is he "unjust"?

One person noted,

the parable's meaning has stumped even the best and most creative interpreters of Scripture. (*Feasting on the Word*, "Homiletical Perspective")

There are those who say that the purpose of a parable is to "**tease the mind into active thought**" (Fred Craddock, Interpretation series; citing C.H. Dodd) If that's the case, then this parable, over all other parables, has succeeded in that purpose above and beyond all expectations – perhaps even the expectations of Jesus himself.

Was the manager actually cheating the master of his money?

Or was the manager simply cutting out the interest being charged? Interest which was actually not allowed by the Mosaic Law; so, in essence, the manager was doing the master a favor.

Or was the manager simply deducting his own 'cut' or commission, therefore making his master look good, but also putting the debtors in his own debt?

I don't know the answer to any of those questions.

And actually, those questions, in a way, may all be missing the mark.

Yes, what the manager did was 'inappropriate': according to the Greek, "not conforming to a particular norm."

(Of course, what norm we are using to make this determination may be up for grabs.)

The manager is 'inappropriate' because he acted outside the bounds of appropriate norms. The master acknowledges that. Even Jesus acknowledges that.

But, of course, the inappropriate or appropriate, the just or unjust, the right or wrong behavior of the manager is not the point.

The manager is not commended for being 'inappropriate'.

The manager is commended for "*acting cleverly*." For using his noggin: for thinking. He used his brain to wrestle with his crisis. So he was thoughtful, judicious, shrewd, clever.

"What a clever solution to your problem! I never would have thought of that. Of course, even if I had, I may not have chosen that course of action. But it is clever nonetheless."

Is Jesus advocating 'inappropriate' actions? No!

Is Jesus advocating out-of-the-box thinking? Maybe. But whether out-of-the-box or not, he is advocating thinking!

Being aware of the society, culture in which we work. Being discerning of the world in which we live.

For simply doing what "feels" right is not enough. We need to engage our mind. God gave us a brain; we need to use it. "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength...and mind*" (Luke 10:27).

The Greek word refers to the use of the mind to consider, to pursue, to explore things.

And with that application of the mind comes an influencing of one's actions and a shaping of one's behavior and a forming of one's will. So Paul writes,

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God. (Romans 12:2 NRSV)

Being clever. Astute. Judicious. Prudent. Even wise.

Use your mind.

And use the resources you have at your disposal.

The rest of chapter sixteen deals a lot with money and possessions: how we handle them. We're called to the wise (clever?) use of what we have.

Precisely what the manager did with what he had available to him.

And notice this key point: the manager pursues his plan in order that "*people will welcome me into their houses.*"

Jesus himself, in his own comments on the parable, talks about using resources "*to make friends so...you will be welcomed...*"

Being welcomed, received: hospitality. Accepting, nurturing friendships, relationships.
Finding a place to belong; building a community.

Use your mind...

...Use the resources – including the skills, expertise, and experience – at your disposal...

...To build a community.

Seems simple enough.

Then why did Jesus have to go all haywire on us and share this offensive, odd parable?

If the message is so simple, why make it so difficult to hear?

Perhaps, because the message is more radical – and offensive – than it at first appears.

Remember: we're talking about this 'inappropriate' manager being welcomed by others, building a community that includes him. Would we want him in our circle of friends?

Remember also the parable that immediately precedes today's story: that parable about a father with two sons. And the younger son goes away and blows his share of the inheritance. And the older son is resentful when the father welcomes and receives the younger son with open, accepting, nurturing arms.

That's the kind of community we're talking about.

And that's a hard pill for us to swallow.

We tend to be far more concerned about the inheritance that the younger son blew.

We're far more upset about the wealth that the manager squandered, maybe not even once but twice.

But remember at the very end of our passage, Jesus brings the hammer down and makes no doubt about it: we cannot use as our standard the inheritance the younger son blew; we cannot make the focus of our life the wealth (whether the rich man's or ours) the manager squandered; we cannot give priority and loyalty to both "*God and wealth.*"

We've got to choose.

And we're called to choose God and nothing else.

And when we do that, God and God alone shapes our priorities and directs our lives and determines our values.

And what is clear in both of these stories is that God's priority is not the inheritance the younger son wasted. God's priority is not the wealth the manager squandered.

God's priority is the people.

And this is the kind of community God calls for. This is the kind of community Jesus invites us into and invites us to welcome and receive and accept and nurture and build.

A community filled with younger sons who blew the inheritance...and even older sons who are resentful about it. A community filled with managers who squandered the wealth entrusted to them. A community filled with "tax collectors and sinners." A community filled with Peters who have denied and Pauls who have persecuted. A community filled with those

pushed out by other communities. And so a community filled with the poor, the widows, the orphans; the down and out, and the downright scoundrels and the out of sight forgotten ones.

A community filled with people like you and me – even when we don't, or can't, see that we too are "those people."

So of course Jesus shares a story that blows our minds. The whole concept blows our minds.

And maybe when our minds are blown, we'll begin to see things more clearly and apply our minds more cleverly and use our resources more astutely and offer ourselves more graciously.

And, yes, we may be just a bit overwhelmed by this concept of such a community, by this notion of such a gathering.

"I'm not sure I can do that: receive 'those people'; admit I am one. I'm not sure I want to welcome the scoundrel, accept the disgraced son. How could I do it? Where would I start?"

And Jesus asks, "Can you make just one step? Will you take just one chance? Will you give it just one try? Will you take just one risk?"

For if we will try to be faithful in even a very little thing, that can grow into being faithful in bigger things and bigger moments and bigger movements.

And when we're not sure we're up to even that, then note one other vital part of the story: the manager does not get what he deserves.

The manager is not thrown in jail, as maybe he should be. His family is not sold to recoup the losses of what was squandered.

The master is magnanimous toward the manager, and the manager does not get what he deserves.

Just like the previous parable: for the younger son does not get what he deserves either.

And neither do we.

We may even try a small step, then give up because it's not worth the risk, so it seems.

We may even squander the gifts and resources we are given.

We may even blow our inheritance.

Even so, we do not get what we deserve.

And that's the basis of this community to which we are called, which we are called to build and support and nurture. That's the foundation of this community to which we ourselves are invited, and to which we are to invite and welcome others.

A community built on grace and mercy and love.

Which can truly blow our minds...and free our minds to be used in creative and out-of-the-box, unexpected, genuine, and generous ways.

A grace and mercy and love that can encourage us to be faithful in little things and catch us when we fall and fail, and encourage us to try again and again and again; knowing that even the stumbles and missteps we make cannot and will not wrench us out of the reach and welcome and embrace of this Lord who shocks us by appearing to commend dishonesty and shady

dealings, but who only wants us to embrace a new and startling way that may blow our minds, but also blows away our old, self-serving ways, and blows fresh air and a fresh start into our tired, worn out lives.

‘Inappropriate’?

Depends upon the standard you’re using.

***HYMN** “Jesus Calls Us” GtG 720

1. **Jesus calls us: o'er the tumult
of our life's wild, restless sea;
day by day his sweet voice soundeth
saying, "Christian, follow me."**
2. **Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying, "Christian, love me more."**
3. **In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."**
4. **Jesus calls us: by thy mercies,
Savior, may we hear thy call,
give our hearts to thine obedience,
serve and love thee best of all.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *(The Apostles' Creed - Contemporary)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.**

(continued...)

**On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

(Today's translation of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission from Book of Common Worship, copyright 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Merciful, loving God...
All: ...hear our prayer.

THE LORD'S PRAYER *(Contemporary)*

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Gracious God,
source of our daily bread and our soul's sustenance,
you feed us with your love
and equip us to share in your purpose.
Receive the offerings of our lives and ourselves,
and continue to expand our hearts,
that we may share the Good News of your gospel
and share in your work in this world.
For we pray by the power of your Spirit,
in the name of your Son. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "Take My Life" GtG 697 (*Verses 1, 4, & 6*)

1. **Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days;
let them flow in ceaseless praise;
let them flow in ceaseless praise.**

4. **Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose,
every power as thou shalt choose.**

6. **Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself and I will be
ever, only, all for thee,
ever, only, all for thee.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...Amen.

***RESPONSE** “Make Me a Servant” StF 2176

**Make me a servant,
humble and meek,
Lord, let me lift up
those who are weak.
And may the prayer of my heart always be:
Make me a servant,
make me a servant,
make me a servant today.**

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POSTLUDE

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