

The 15th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C, 2022
September 18, 2022
Luke 16:1-13
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“I’m pregnant.”

That’s what I heard my mother say when I walked into the room. Now in some contexts, that would be cause for rejoicing. But in this case, it was cause for confusion. Because, when I heard my mom say this, she was 67 years old!

I walked into the kitchen one afternoon, and my mom was on the phone with someone. And as I walked in, I heard my mom say “I’m pregnant.” I think I grabbed my chest to check my heart. Mom is pregnant?

I went to my room, and began to pray. Clearly, this was one of those miraculous pregnancies we read about in the Bible!

Later, mom came into my room with a look of concern on her face. I said to her, “You’re pregnant?” She smiled and said, “Didn’t I teach you not to take things out of context?”

It turns out that the person on the other end of the phone was sharing a conversation she’d had with her daughter. The daughter had always hoped to have a baby, but she and her husband had trouble conceiving.

So the lady on the phone called my mom with good news. She said to my mom, “Guess what my daughter said to me today?” And my mom guessed. The daughter had said, “I’m pregnant.”

It is dangerous to take things out of context, isn’t it? Sometimes, you can only understand what you just heard if you know what came before it. Otherwise, what you just heard won’t make any sense.

I think that’s true of this weekend’s passage from Luke’s Gospel!

If we take this passage out of context, it is downright confusing. It sounds like Jesus is telling us to be dishonest. It sounds like Jesus is encouraging us to engage in immoral financial dealings! “Cheat a little here, be a bit dishonest there, and God will commend you for it!”

That’s what it sounds like... *at first*.

But we will only understand what Jesus is saying HERE if we remember what he said just BEFORE this passage.

What comes right before this passage? Why, one of everyone’s favorite parables – the Prodigal Son! *That* is what comes right before today’s passage. And *that* parable helps us to

understand *this* parable!

Let's quickly recall the story of the prodigal son. It's the story of a dad, the head of the household. He has some money. And a member of his household – his son – asks for his inheritance. So the head of the household gives some of his treasure to his son.

And what does the son do with that treasure? Luke says, "He *squandered* it." He used it in an immoral way. Then, having wasted the treasure which had been entrusted to him, he went home, where the head of the household – his dad – reacted in a way that surprised people. The dad forgave the boy. There was a good ending for the squanderer. That's the story we hear at the end of Chapter 15 in Luke's Gospel.

And what happens in *today's* parable, at the beginning of the 16th chapter? It's the story of a head of a household – a master – who has some money. And he entrusts some of his treasure, his wealth, to a member of his household - his steward. And what does the steward do with that treasure? He misuses it. He acts immorally.

In fact, Luke uses the same word here as he does in the prodigal son story! Luke says that the steward SQAUNDERS the money that was entrusted to him. And once again, at the end of the story, the head of the household reacts in a way that surprises people. He praises the steward. There is a good ending for the squanderer.

I hope by now you can see and hear the similarities in these two parables, which sit side by side in Luke's Gospel.

In both of these parables, I don't think Jesus is asking us to focus mainly on the sinful behavior of the 'Squanderer.' Rather, I think Jesus wants us to focus on the *head of the household*. Parables are always about God, and God's kingdom. In both of these parables, the head of the household reveals how GOD deals with us!

These are parables about God, the head of the household. Our God entrusts treasure to us. God gives us our generous inheritance. And sometimes we squander it through our greed and our mistakes.

But, the point Jesus is making is this: God knows full well that we will keep making mistakes – yet God keeps entrusting his treasure to us. And when we do make mistakes, God's reaction is not what some would expect. God forgives. God is patient. God rejoices in our change of heart. There's a good ending available for us!

To be clear - these parables do *not* give us permission to 'go and sin.' Rather, these parables call us to remember the treasure God has placed into our hands. God is *so* generous toward us. I think both of these parables have the same life-changing point, and it's this:

Think about the treasure God has put into your hands. Then ask - What am I doing with it? Squandering, or serving?

+ God has entrusted to you the amazing gift and treasure of life! Are you squandering that gift through selfishness, or are you serving others by becoming a blessing to someone else's life?

+ God has entrusted to you the amazing gift of your brain! Are you squandering your intelligence by pursuing earthly wisdom alone, or are you seeking Christ's wisdom?

+ God has given you the gift of your body. Are you squandering that gift through unhealthy living and terrible relationships? Or are you using your body to serve, to feed your neighbor, to lift someone's burden, to build a better world?

+ God gave you the gift of your heart. We squander that gift on emotions like lust, anger, hate. God want us to use our hearts to love, to forgive, to be courageously compassionate.

+ God gives us the treasure, the gift of relationships. We squander the gift when we take each other for granted. God gave us our neighborhood and nation. We squander those gifts when we take them for granted.

+ God has entrusted to you your present and your future. If you don't ask God what he wants you to do today and tomorrow, you might squander the gift.

You get the idea.

Every day, I spend lots of energy to get done what "has" to get done. I have to make time to answer my emails, or do my work, or pay my bills. I have to be creative and energetic to do that each day.

At the end of today's parable Jesus basically asks: If you can be that energetic about daily tasks, what would happen if you were equally energetic about doing the things that last eternally?

I make time to do my work – most days. Do I make time to pray, most days? I answer my emails, most days. Do I read the scripture, most days? I make time to eat – EVERY day! Do I serve, every day?

You get the idea.

The parables of the "prodigal son" and "shady steward" ultimately tell us the same story. It's the story of a God who is persistently generous toward his consistently imperfect children.

God keeps entrusting the treasure of this life into our hands. Sometimes we use that treasure well, for the salvation of our souls and the blessing of our neighbors. Sometimes we squander the opportunity that is opened to us every morning when we wake up.

But the story of God's forgiveness and generosity is renewed each morning. And that is a story that is always worth repeating.