**The Unjust Steward (Luke 16.1-13)**

St Peter’s Wellington, 22 Sept 2019

*Bishop Richard Randerson*

**Jesus’ parables often used scenes that would be familiar to his listeners**, in this case his disciples, with the Pharisees and the crowd listening in.

**For Palestinians** the image of a wealthy landowner who rents out land to small farmers, and has a steward to manage leases and rents, would be familiar.

**The landowner is told** the steward is squandering his money. He calls the steward who says nothing in his defence and is sacked.

**The steward is in a dilemma**: too old to dig, too proud to beg. Before anyone knows of his sacking **he calls in some of the debtors** and gives them large discounts on their bills so they will look after him when he is jobless.

**The landowner commends** him for acting astutely! **PROBLEM!** Is Jesus commending corruption and graft in business? **Commentators** say:

* The landowner was a generous man: he did not jail the steward
* Did steward decide to throw all on the landowner’s mercy?
* The steward may have been only returning his cut on transactions
* With the small farmers rejoicing and praising the landowner’s generosity, he did not want to appear mean and so soaked up this unexpected adulation – PR!
* The landowner may have thought this is business: the steward is a cunning scoundrel but he recognised his dilemma.

**And so you might think** that with these considerations the story of the unjust steward scrubs up pretty well. **A few rules were broken** but Hey! **everyone came out on top** – the steward feathers his own nest; the small farmers all get a big bonus; and the landowner gets his halo polished!

**But Jesus is not saying dishonesty is OK** or that the end justifies the means. **A parable always requires us** to look for a deeper meaning, **which appears in v.8 when Jesus says;** “the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light”.

**Now we are all children of this world** in the sense of the world being the water we swim in and the air we breathe. **None of us is free** from daily decisions about money or contracts or tax or relationships with individuals, corporations or government.

**But as followers of Jesus** we are also called to be **children of the light**, to be seeking things of eternal worth and allowing those things to shape the way we deal with things of this world. **Jesus is saying that we are smarter at worldly** things, or take them more seriously, than things of eternal worth.

**And what are the things of eternal worth?** Quite simply, putting all our trust in God and God’s love. And allowing that love to flow through us to bring that same love to others.

**In the parable the steward** uses money to benefit the debtors. He does it for his own self-interest, but **Jesus calls us to use our money, resources,** time and talents to assist those in need, free of self-interest.

G B Caird: *“if we invest money in benefaction then we exchange it for the currency of heaven”.*

**Jesus’ coming confronted the disciples with a choice**, and confronts us also today. It is the choice of discipleship. Do we see Jesus as the revelation of God’s truth and love and give our lives to follow him? And are we as astute in our discipleship as we are in handling the things of this world?

**In v 13 Jesus says** you cannot serve God and Mammon (= Money). Paul writes (1 Timothy 6:10): *the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

**It is not money that is evil**, but the love of it as an end in itself. This is idolatrous. The Pharisees scoffed at Jesus because it says “they loved money”.

**As children of light** we operate in the world of money, but money has menace. There are **powerful temptations** – politics, business, church and in all the pressures of a materialistic and consumerist society– to use money or make choices in our own self-interest, rather than for the last, the lost and the least in society.

**The greatest evil in life is losing sight of its purpose, the discipleship** to which we are called, i.e.to seek the well-being of all people and creation.

**When individual or institutional success** takes precedence over serving our brothers and sisters then we are acting as children of the darkness.

**L T Johnson: *The disposition of our possessions*** *is indicative of the disposition of the self – where our treasure lies, there our heart is also.*

**The story of two widows**

* In a large South American city there had been a subway fare increase
* the parish priest at a large city church knew this would make it hard for two widows in his congregation to get to church
* So he announced a retiring collection for “anyone who might be affected by the fare increase"
* He noticed the two widows were the first to put money in
* They explained that they knew what it was like to be poor and they wanted to help so that no one would be kept away from church by the fare increase.

**Those two widows** are moving examples of what it means to be children of the light: putting their whole trust in God, and living sacrificially to help those in need.

[richardrandersonnz@gmail.com](mailto:richardrandersonnz@gmail.com)az