

September 18, 2016

1Timothy 2:1-3

Bidding Prayer

In our prayers, let us hold up to the light and love of God's presence all those who work in God's vineyard. Let the people say:

Bless and guide them, blessed Spirit.

For the goodness within the human heart,
for all those who work for healing,
for people in the caring ministries,
for ecologists and researchers,
for pastoral care workers and friends,
for the hands of Christ in the world,
for those who care and share in little ways, let the people say:

Bless and guide them, blessed Spirit.

For all those who learn and teach,
for apprentices and supervisors,
for students and resource people,
for program directors and camp leaders,
for schools and educators,
for wisdom and knowledge and guidance, let the people say:

Bless and guide them, blessed Spirit.

For those in high places and high office,
For those elected to represent the people,
for those entrusted with keeping the peace,
for those trained to protect our land,
for those who work in government bureaucracy, let the people say

Bless and guide them, blessed Spirit.

for those who struggle for liberation and justice,
for the witness of faith communities,
for mission and development workers,
for those who risk their lives for others,
for those who work for human rights,
for those who speak truth on behalf of the oppressed,
for all who bear witness to the way of Christ, let the people say

Bless and guide them, blessed Spirit. Amen.

Luke 16: 1-13 **The Shrewd Manager**

There are certain things I find so easy to dislike. Most Rap music and long line ups fall easily into this category. Cyclists riding through stop signs and red lights go right in. Religious hatemongering and those practicing the politics of fear easily qualify; and then there is this parable.

Don't you just dislike this parable? At first hearing it is tough to accept or understand, let alone like. The fact that the parable is followed by a series of moral and allegorical explanations, which we didn't read today indicates the difficulty that Luke and the later compilers of the scripture also had with its passage. Remember that Luke was a Greek writing almost a century after the fact, and unschooled in Jewish law. Luke also consistently depicted the rich in a bad light.

This parable begins to make sense when we recognize a detail assumed as common knowledge at the time of its telling, but not available to Luke or later commentators: that is the Law of Moses forbade Jews from charging interest to fellow Jews.

But even so we have difficulty hearing the parable today because we filter it through our middle class experience of our modern mixed economy of capitalism and social safety-net. Neither of which are operative in this story.

Huge profits and high risk were the ground rules of ancient commerce. Begging on the streets was the only form of social safety-net. What's more the economic gulf between the peasant hearers and the mega rich Estate owners and the rich merchants they lend to, is like the gap between our middleclass and billionaires today.

So, let's hear it again with some of this insider information.

There once was a professional manager questionably accused of acting dishonestly with his Boss's money. He is dismissed out of hand by the rich owner and is called to account for his actions.

The manager who was not embezzling funds or storing up a nest egg says to himself: **“What will I do now that I am losing my job? I'm not strong enough to dig in the mines. That's a death sentence. I'm ashamed to beg, that's certain starvation. I need a way to endear myself to others.”**

Then a brilliant idea comes to mind. **“Aha!”** He says: **“We Jews are not allowed to charge interest to one another, but everyone does, and so does my boss, in a roundabout way.”**

So the shrewd manager, even though he is already dismissed, summons his boss's rich debtors one by one.

To the first one he asks: **“What do you owe?”**

“A hundred barrels of olive oil.” is the answer.

“Well, then take your bill and change it to fifty.”

To the next one he asks: **“How much do you owe?”**

And the answer comes back, **“One thousand bushels of wheat.”**

“Well, then take your bill and make it eight hundred.”

On and on and on he goes through the accounts, subtracting the unlawful interest disguised as produce or goods owed.

News travels fast and the rich owner soon discovers that he has been exposed. His business practices are now open to public scrutiny. He will lose face and be caught out breaking the Law of Moses if he does not accept the manager's final accounting.

So he stands in **Awe** of this creative, this shrewd solution. The manager will have many friends for the future. And the compassionate

aspect of the Law of Moses is preserved. What's more, as the parable ends it is an open question as to whether the shrewd manager will still be released or retained.

So, welcome the shrewd for the right reasons, because the kingdom of God has a way of succeeding in spite of human efforts to the contrary.

A present day contextual equivalent to this parable would be the global refugee crisis. Millions of people forced to leave or flee their war torn homelands with next to nothing, with no meaningful safety-net, have nowhere to go.

In desperation they seek ways to insure a better future. They roll the dice and board dangerously overcrowded dilapidated vessels and hope to be received in countries with histories of human rights, and humanitarian aid.

They actively circumvent the growing political practices of lifeboat ethics and trust instead the fundamental law of human decency: That all lives are precious and to be preserved. They will go through the list of countries until one takes them in.

When the tide of human misery begins to overwhelm certain nations, their heartless immigration tactics are exposed. People around the world are in awe of the courage, tenacity and desperation of these refugees.

A wave of human decency is released and pressures the people in high places to open the doors of their nations to receive these refugees in to our homes.

Application for Today:

Welcome the shrewd for the right reasons.

God's New Day has a way of working out in spite of the dodges and designs of the people in high places.

It has always been up to us, to you and me, to get it right.