

Stewards of Christ's Mercy, Hope and Friendship
based on Luke 16:1-9, David Jahnke, 9/18/16

This church has a lot of wise people in it. I love how God's Word is active and alive and speaking through so many of you. It was great to gather again in small groups and even this week's meetings were interesting and vibrant.

C.E. and session had an excellent joint meeting on Wednesday night. And as we talked about the struggle that the church faces in a growingly secular world, I said, "It is not only an uphill climb, it's like we are pushing a giant boulder up the hill."

But then I remembered Tuesday night's deacons' meeting and how we talked about how Jesus is yoked to us in our uphill climb and whenever we need a break, Jesus is glad to give it to us.

We are tempted to think the boulder is bad people out there. But it's not. The boulder is death and the sins that cause it. And today's passage levels the playing field when it comes to the human condition. There certainly are very bad people out there who have basically given themselves over to the victory of the boulder and who are pushing down from above with the devil, wanting to crush us. But the Spirit has reached the huge majority of the world's peoples who believe in the things of God-- life and health and peace and goodness. They might not know or understand or believe in the eternal foundations of all these things... but they are interested in overcoming evil, and most hope in eternal life. They are with us in striving to get the boulder up and over the mountain.

And if you are not sure about this, please notice that God commends the children *of this generation*-- meaning non-Christians-- for their shrewdness. And he tells us-- the children of the light-- to make friends with them. Why? And this is the really amazing part...because they may end up welcoming us into eternal homes! In other words, we may be surprised at who firsts greets us and shows us our into homes in the Kingdom of heaven.

This brought to mind Jesus' teaching regarding someone who was not a follower of Jesus but was out there healing in Jesus' name. The disciples thought there was something wrong with this and wanted to stop him but Jesus told them to let him continue because whoever was not against Jesus was for him.

So if it is not crystal-clear to you that someone is against Jesus' way of love, peace, compassion and truth, you should perceive them as a friend and ally.

In addition to lifting up the seeming outsider, our parable also humbles us on the inside. The master who is displeased with his stewards is God. The unfaithful steward is everyone who knows they have been called by the master to do his work and manage his property but who squander the work and property to varying degrees. So God summons us and demands that we make an accounting of his property. He warns us that we will not be able to manage it much longer.

So what is the master's property? Everything around us, everything we think we own, is God's. At any time, it might be taken away. And over time, it certainly will. Even our bodies are God's and they will be taken away from us as well.

So we are all in this basic place of 1: belonging to God, 2. not doing a very good job of managing God's property; 3. and in profound need of mercy. And we should find solidarity that we are all in the same boat. And this solidarity will aid and motivate our seeking friendship with all peoples and cooperation in pushing up the boulder..

And the giant boulder is but a grain of sand to our God. His mercy which is showered down day after day and generation after generation, is wearing away and breaking down the boulder. The traumas and regrets of the past that haunt us; fears of failing or not being good enough all fade because we are all imperfect sinners of Christ's own redeeming saved by grace, not by our own successes. We mess up! So what? Learn from it and move on.

And knowing that we are all deeply indebted, we can then do what the unfaithful manager did-- forgive the debts of those indebted to the Master.

This is where the passage seems particularly scandalous. We think, "The manager has no right to forgive what is owed the master! Only the master can do that! Why does Jesus commend this?" Because he told the indebted of his day that their sins were forgiven. And the righteous around him thought, "Only God could do that!"

And the scandal grows even greater when Jesus tells us that all the sins that we forgive will be forgiven by God. Going even further he insists that we do so. So if we have to forgive the sins of others, including idolatry and unbelief which plague not only the world but the church as well-- how dare we treat anyone as anything other than a friend and an equal? Again I add a tiny caveat about those who have committed themselves to evil.

But in general, this kind of radical egalitarianism before God is an amazingly beautiful place to find yourself. I am so grateful to have been freed from the awful perception game of evaluation and critique-- consciously and sub-consciously judging others and myself and fearing their judgment. No more walking around with that weight. I have chosen to smile and bless silently as I pass by or share space with others. I sometimes even initiate conversation with people I do not know.

I had a couple of interesting, great chats this week; one with a Chinese Buddhist in the YMCA sauna and one with a coach who had a Trump sign on his lawn. I want to take seriously Jesus' command to make friends with children of this generation not only because we are in a very similar place as human beings and before God. But because most everyone has a shrewdness and knowledge and worldly wisdom which we can learn from and apply toward the good.

I read this last night in the book *Jayber Crow* by Wendell Berry. Thanks to Jon Wayman who gave me the book; another example of this church's wisdom becoming a part of God's Word.

An orphaned young man is comparing his Christian orphanage and his Bible College experiences with the university. (See next page)

The university was in some ways the opposite of Good Shepherd [the Orphanage.] The Good Shepherrd looked upon the outside world as a threat to it conventional wisdom. The university looked upon itself as a threat to the conventional wisdom of the outside world. ...it not only knew more than ordinary people but was more advanced and had a better idea of the world of the future....The Good Shepherd and Pigeonville [Bible] College were trying to be the world of the past. [*Jayber Crow*, Wendell Berry, p. 70]

This particularly struck since I was recently invited to an incredible high school which is all about training our children in the most advanced fields and preparing them for excellent contributions to society in the years ahead.

We have to decide which kind of an institution we want to be. One which seeks and accepts the knowledge and wisdom of this generation (in addition to that of the past) or one which seeks solely to return to a past which is gone. I think the Pharisees demanded clinging more closely to the past while Jesus was always headed into the future and new life.

One more concluding illustration. So after some rough patches this week, including my first ever migraines, I decided that I had to get out in the beautiful weather. I went to Tamaques Park and walked around the forested part in the back and started to feel a bit like myself again. As I reached the end of the path, I paused for a second and a beautiful Sufjan Stephens song came over my ipad. He sang:

when your heirloom's wilted brown...
when the devil's pushing down...
and you hesitate to laugh...[Heirloom, Sufjan Stephens]

I smiled as I remembered writing about how everything we have wilting and the devil pushing down on the boulder. And I looked up and I saw 25 giant trees around me; all of them shooting up into into the crystal blue sky above...and I raised my hands up and I joined their stretch and their praise reaching into the heavens. And all was well once again.

When it comes down to it, all we can do...and what almost all of us will do is look up and reach up and out for mercy and life. We can become children again, playing in the forests, remembering how dependent we are upon the grace and goodness and strength of another who is so much bigger and stronger than us.

And remembering that we are all essentially and eternally children in need of love, comfort, and sustenance, let us treat each other accordingly.

The wisdom of the world!!

I remembered when I was in the

telling others that God has and will continue to forgive them.

And how dare we claim that

The other day I had a kind of simple revelation. I do not have to get annoyed when external factors seem to be limiting or hindering my will. Instead, I can choose to enter into whatever the will of the other is...and as long as it is a good thing, I am not only blessed by the thing itself but I am blessed by being a blessing.

DONT LAUGH AT ME...IN GODS EYES WERE ALL THE SAME...

When the devil and

demonize, judge or accuse

So many who are not explicitly “children of the light” are not as bad morally or in as bad of a spiritual place as we may think. We maybe should not be so quick to .

Who is indebted to the master? Everyone out there. And the

We are stewards of every

We can change the heart of a displeased master by our willingness to forgive the debts of the indebted. We really have no right to do so but any traditional theology. But Jesus’ brings radical and even scandalous grace to theology.

Judgment was coming upon the managers of God’s vineyard. That is the premise of this passage. And there were a couple of choices being offered at the time of Jesus. One was to narrow the confines of true religion and set up harsher standards of purity and righteousness. Another very different view of Jesus’ was to make friends with the indebted that they might be hospitable to us if and when we find ourselves penniless and indebted.

I have always been a bit astonished, even scandalized, by today’s passage. Jesus lifts up the shrewdness of a dishonest manager and suggests that we use wealth gained in a worldly manner to make friends in this life who can protect or welcome us. It all seems rather underhanded, un-Christlike.

But none of this is the true scandal.

16:10 "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.

16:11 If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?

16:12 And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?

16:13 No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be

It can be really hard to try and preach from the perspective of Jesus Christ because his Way is so far from how we live that preaching his way can make us feel alienated. So I remind you that he never let any lack of holiness or understanding or faithfulness keep others from his presence. His call to perfection was always secondary to his perfect grace and love that never lets people go. devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."