

## *Based upon Gospel Reading: Luke 16:1-13 Pentecost 15; Proper 20*

*Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.' Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' 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 make it eighty.' And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.*

*"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. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."*

Luke 16:1-13

I imagine that most of us aren't what you might call "evil." Sure, we can be a little selfish sometimes, unforgiving and ungenerous, but few people I've ever met were actually consumed with malice or hate.

Often, we may think of sin as a kind of personal failing or a failure (or unwillingness) to follow the "rules." But most of the sin we are complicit in is what we might call systemic sin, or the sins you are caught up in oftentimes without your knowledge. A big one on lots of people's minds these days is racism. Again, I think very few people actually hold malice in their hearts for those whose skin color is different, but at the same time it is true that past government policies and cultural ideas have denied people of color many of the opportunities that people who look like me (or my ancestors) have had.

But there are many other systems of sin that we get caught up in. I have a cell phone, but I also know that some of the components in that phone are made in unsavory and exploitative conditions. I feel like I need to have a phone so that people can get ahold of me, and I don't really have control over labor conditions where some of the metals were mined or in the factories where it was produced. I'm kind of stuck, there's something that I need, but having it also makes, even if only a little bit, complicit in sometimes evil conditions.

In this passage though, Jesus is reminding us that even though we get stuck in systems of sin outside of our control or choice, we aren't exactly off the hook. The challenge we face, as followers of Jesus, is to find ways to counter or mediate the sins we are complicit in. In this story of the manager from the Gospel, we see him practice generosity and forgiveness to debtors who have been likely exploited by the rich man. That his motives aren't exactly pure doesn't take away from the impact of his choices.

So much of our lives is out of our control, but how we respond *is* in our control. Most of all, Jesus calls us to not be complacent but to be persistent in our efforts to push away the sin in our lives and join Him in building the kingdom of God.

Blessings,

*Jon*