

# LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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## HOLY MISCHIEF

**TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

**18th September 2022**

**Luke 16:1** Then 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. <sup>2</sup> 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.’ <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’ <sup>5</sup> So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ <sup>6</sup> He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ <sup>7</sup> 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.’ <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.

**Luke 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. <sup>11</sup> If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? <sup>13</sup> 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.”

The society in which Jesus lived was very different from ours. The only families able to accumulate gold and silver were the powerful landowners. Jesus calls it *tainted money*. The wealth of those powerful people is unjust because it has been amassed unjustly. Moreover, they enjoy it without sharing it with the poor and hungry.

In effect Jesus says to the rich: *“Use your unjust money to help the poor; win their friendship by sharing with them your goods. They will be your friends. At the hour of death, money will no longer be of use to you. Then they will welcome you into the house of the Father.”*

When the Pharisees heard all this they sneered at Jesus, because they loved money. They considered wealth a sign of God’s blessing on their lives.

Although a long biblical tradition reinforces this view of wealth as a blessing, it is not true of the gospel of Jesus. Let us say this loud and clearly, because there are rich people who think, almost as a matter of course, that economic success and prosperity are clear evidence of God’s favour.

The thrust is that a follower of Jesus may not just do anything he/she pleases with money. Making money, spending and enjoying it is unjust if it forgets the poorest.

**JOSÉ A PAGOLA - *Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year C***

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The parable and the following sayings bristle with questions and a good deal of ink has been spilt explaining this text. What’s it about?

The master is not commending further dishonesty but rather the shrewdness of his employee. At this level, the parable is typically Lucan: a disreputable figure is held up as a disconcerting example (cf. Zacchaeus, the prodigal son, the good thief, all special to Luke). The point is clear: act now so that your future will be assured.

### Thought for the day

The banking crisis is only one example of a wider “honesty deficit” in public life. Even people working for charities are sometimes found, unfortunately, to be lacking in integrity. As a result, the story of dishonest management will not lack contemporary echoes. It also means that the shock of story—the manager continues to fix the books for his own benefit—is just as much a shock today as it would have been in first-century Palestine.

If that were not enough, the ironic teaching drawn in v. 9 borders on the sarcastic, not to say caustic. No missing the meaning, in any case! But what is the meaning? It can’t be simply copy that distressing example of the manager. To act, not to delay, seems to be at the centre.

**KIERAN O’MAHONY OSA - [tarsus.ie](http://tarsus.ie)**

On the face of it Jesus appears to be encouraging some sharp practice when he tells of the man who, on being fired by his employer, tries to make sure that he will be able to call in a few favours when he leaves. We may take it for granted that the point of the story is not that Jesus wishes to encourage dishonesty but rather that he wants his followers to be aware that they live in the real world and that they should always seek to make the best of the situation in which they find themselves.

The context of this parable is the right use of money and Jesus is unambiguous when it comes to this. Money, tainted as it is, still has a place in the life of believers. It should be used to help the poor.

**SEAN GOAN - *Let the Reader Understand, Year C***

### POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. As often with the parables of Jesus, this one is intended to shock in order to make us think. Jesus is not praising the injustice of the servant, but his purposefulness in preparing for the future. In your experience what difference does it make when you are purposeful and energetic instead of lethargic?
2. It was his master's call to account that galvanised the servant into action. What have been the experiences, or people, that have galvanised you into action when you had been somewhat half-hearted in your efforts.
3. Who have been the people whose energy, drive and astuteness have been an inspiration to you in how to handle difficult situations?
4. 'No servant can be the slave of two masters'. When have you experienced the truth of this statement?

**JOHN BYRNE OSA - *Intercom***

### Scriptural comments (Michel de Verteuil)

Lord, we thank you for free spirited people you send us in our families, workplaces, parish communities, neighbourhoods.

Like the steward in Jesus' parable, they are often labeled wasteful or dishonest but, like the master, we feel admiration for them, recognizing that they know how to deal with people better than we church people who are supposed to be children of the light.

So often we make a fuss about having accounts right, and everything in our house in the right place, whereas for them it is people who count.

We end up respected but lonely; they however, even though earthly success fails them, win themselves many friends who welcome to them into their hearts and are forever faithful to them.

They value secondary virtues as secondary not primary, - punctuality, good order, neatness, obedience to authorities but they can be trusted to value what is truly important - courtesy to the poor, trust, the willingness to admit mistakes.

They know that power, popularity and influence are always tainted,

and not to be made much of – just like money; they can be trusted with genuine riches like good friends, children, health, nature.

They set no great store by things like clothes, fancy houses and cars which are not part of the people who own them; they have a good share of what is their very own - honesty, sincerity, integrity, openness.

They know that in life we have to choose our values.

We cannot have two sets of priorities;

if we try, we end up not making one of them a priority.

They are not subject to any material thing, truth is their only master and

they find freedom in being its servants.

If you think that all the parables of Jesus are pleasant stories about people of integrity, then today's gospel might make you think again. In this story a manager has been given his notice by his CEO and decides, while he still can, to even up the tables for those who are struggling to pay their debts to the company. He uses the power he still has to change the future for these debtors - and for himself. He is happy to make better arrangements for the debtors. The manager is free-spirited, a bit of a scoundrel yes, but Jesus liked scoundrels, once their efforts were put to good use. The only value money has is in the way that it is used. He is squandering money, but he is not squandering opportunities.

Today climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing our world and it has grave implications for many aspects of our lives: environmental, social, economic and political. We know that just a hundred fossil fuel companies are responsible for 70% of the carbon emissions which drive this crisis. These corporations care little for future generations. Young people are standing up to such systems, however, calling them to account, engaging in political action and challenging all of us to raise our voices for our common home. They tell us that change is coming whether we like it or not! Today's parable invites us, like the manager, to 'holy mischief'.

*Local faith communities can create awareness and take action on the climate crisis by writing to politicians, supporting youth climate movements, listening to the experiences and concerns of young people, and inviting them to speak at events. What 'holy mischief' are you being called to?*

**TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT – Go Deeper**