



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon by Pastor Jami Anderson, Sept. 19, 2010

Ah yes, the Gospel of Wealth –or the Gospel About Wealth – where we find Jesus commending a dishonest steward or manager. “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.” Yes, this is a tough one – dishonest wealth, dishonest managers.

But let’s be honest in considering who WE are as Children of God. We are certainly a mixed bag – fun-loving, serious, nervous, goofy, boaters, hikers, card players, gamblers, dancers, drinkers, teetotalers, well-dressed, poorly dressed, spiritually mature, spiritually immature, wise, unwise. Some of us may fit in all of these categories, all of us fit in at least one.

We are an extremely varied group – there is no cookie cutter for the Christian. And in the midst of this diversity and difference we are asked to be friends with each other – to get along and help each other out. And I think it is in that understanding that can help us make sense of the very puzzling parable and words spoken by Jesus as reported by Luke in the gospel this morning.

Let’s keep remembering ourselves as part of this strange and wonderful crowd of human beings. As a human being – what do you do when the bottom drops out of your world?

When you realize that you will have to file for bankruptcy?

When you realize that your spouse or friend or child REALLY IS dying?

When you realize the mistake you made means you are going to be arrested?

When you realize the boss is going to fire you? And so on and so forth. There are moments in all of our lives when we scramble to save the world we know. Sometimes the danger involves literally running for our lives when an out-of-control driver is headed towards us or we find ourselves in some other kinds of life-ending danger. We scramble to save ourselves as the will to survive kicks in.

That’s the way we are made. In those moments of struggle we look for and rely on our connections – what will preserve our life. These are not moments for well reasoned logic – these are moments when we are scrambling – we want help, we want a solution, we want life to continue as we know it.

I always feel some sort of sorrow when I read about or see people scrambling to proclaim their innocence in the midst of obvious guilt. Like Rod Blagoiveich on trial with tapes played for all to hear or police officers caught on video or I remember watching videos of a hazing event at a high school. Once the tape was released to the media, along came the protestations by their parents, and the threats of lawsuits, and expensive lawyers called in. And I always wonder why people would do that when they are obviously guilty? But if I’m honest with myself I know that I also try desperately to whitewash or justify my misdeeds and I’d guess it is human nature to protect ourselves and that which we hold dear to us, even at the expense of being less than honest.

So, I imagine that none of us can truly separate ourselves from the story of the dishonest steward. In some form, we've all been there. Jesus, as both God and human knows that.

And he's asking – O.K. when you have trouble whom do you have connections with? How connected are you? Is your life filled with other human beings who will help you and care for you or are you so pure and prudent and cautious that you live outside of the world of real people? Jesus' words are a put-down of the children of light. I think he's saying to them – don't be patting yourselves on the back for being pure. How connected are you?

Do you have friends – real friends? Are you tied in to others? Do you live in the reality of a nitty-gritty dishonest world? Do you live with people on a real level that involves honest humility and honest assessment of what it means to be human? Or do you put on a show?

I've said that the use of the words “dishonest wealth” is difficult for me. And Jesus speaking about being faithful with dishonest wealth. Well, let me try this interpretation out on you. Perhaps dishonest wealth is the things of this world – the things that don't matter. It's the realization that nothing we have is totally pure. It's the stuff we think gives pleasure to our lives, but it doesn't really matter. Like whether we play cards or not, or wear fancy clothes, or own a bank, or drive a great car, or have tattoos and body piercings. You can make some connections – have relationships with others with the stuff that doesn't really matter – like shared hobbies, boat rides, ski outings, other interests - and they open the way to make lasting connections with the stuff that really matters – and we know what that is.

We can be faithful even when surrounded with dishonest wealth. It is a matter of our commitment, our foundation. Can we be entrusted with the true riches? Is our total commitment to God – to loving God with all of our hearts and loving our neighbors as ourselves? Because ultimately our faith matters – faithful all the way through, with whatever comes as part of life in the human race.

Your Vestry has just agreed to start each meeting by one member sharing their faith story with the others. This is a deep and personal commitment that they are making. What they don't yet know is that soon they will realize that listening to those stories will become the most important part of the Vestry meeting. The rest that follows won't matter half as much as the wealth they have in a shared faith. It will put life in a better perspective.

I remember an interesting experience I had awhile back. I was sitting in the University of Wyoming student union at the end of the first week of classes. I enjoyed watching the variety of students passing by me. I also noticed a number of tables set up, displays for students to sign up for organization and credit cards, and phones, etc. Right next to me was a fairly young man at a table filled with religious literature – I noticed Bibles and other books and brochures. He stood by the table and watched the people walk by. Not once did anyone talk with him or did he engage anyone in conversation. And I studied him – clean, well cut hair, tan chino pants, nice plaid shirt. I decided he was one of those “children of light.” And he probably figured he was out witnessing for the Lord. The problem was – no one heard, no one was listening. He didn't speak the language of the students passing by.

Jesus is telling us to witness using the ways of the world. Witness being a full, honest to the best of our ability, real human being. He says; be shrewd, make lasting connections. You can have weird hair and witness. You can play cards and witness. You can talk about what matters to other people and connect with them. Go for it- realize the dishonest wealth is false; it won't satisfy, so don't serve it. But realize it is part of you and it surrounds you – so be real with yourself and others.

Abandon yourself to committed discipleship. What is the commitment of your heart? That is what matters – the rest doesn't. Serve God as fully human and fully present. Make lasting connections with God and each other.

And when the bottom drops out of our world, when we are struggling and scrambling, when we realize we've messed up or that life isn't fair, that's when we'll call in those lasting connections – the ones made with real people and the ones made with our Lord. And we will know once again what really matters.

Thanks be to God.