

November 17, 2019  
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Luke 16:1-13 Earn, Save, Give  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 16:1-13 New Revised Standard Version

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. 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."

My favorite Methodist John Wesley, uses the scripture we will read today in his sermon called "The Use of Money." In that sermon he makes three points: earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can. Wesley said that earning money was about participating in God's healing and creative work in the world. He didn't want people to earn money by hurting or exploiting themselves or others or God's creation.

Saving money for John Wesley wasn't having a big savings account. Saving all you can was about living a simplified lifestyle. It was a warning against extravagance and overindulgence. Wesley said anything that we have that is unnecessary has been "extracted from the blood of the poor." Save all you can is about doing without, simplifying our living so that others may simply live.

We are to earn all we can and save all we can so that we can give away all we can. Wesley said, "If Methodists would give all they can, then all would have enough." It is a plea for generosity and a plea for compassion for the poor and needy. Wesley wasn't against people having money, and he didn't think that money was evil. What mattered most was what people did with their money. He said, "Money is an excellent gift of God...in the hands of God's children it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, clothing for the naked." Earning, saving, and giving are all ways that we give ourselves to God.<sup>1</sup>

Wesley said that when we have money, it changes our priorities and our relationships. We feel independent and self-reliant. We forget how to receive and how to give. He said wealth also separates us from the poor and because God is especially present with the poor, wealth separates us from God. When we give to help the suffering of the poor, we are participating in Christ's ministry.

We give because giving is a gift from God. Every thing that we have, every breath that we take is a free, unearned gift of grace from a giving God who invites us to share in the divine life and gift of giving. At creation, God called us stewards. A steward is someone who makes sure that everyone has a place at the table. God has called us to make sure the human family has all things necessary in order to have life and have it abundantly. We are called to use our gifts to

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gnjumc.org/earn-all-you-can-save-all-you-can-and-give-all-you-can/>

give our voice on behalf of the voiceless, to give our insights and influence to build communities of shalom, peace, that reflect God's world of justice, generosity, and joy.<sup>2</sup>

We give in gratitude because God first gives to us. We love God and we love our neighbor through our giving. Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can. Jesus had just shared the beautiful parable of the Prodigal Son, and he tells another story about someone squandering all of the money. READ BIBLE

There is a rumor that the manager is squandering the master's resources. The master accuses the manager of cooking the books and said he has to give an account of the property. The manager knows he will not be trusted. We do that don't we, we trust some people because of their skin color or their appearance. They have authority or power so they get a pass when they mistreat someone with less. We have to constantly tell ourselves to rewrite the bias that we have because we do see race and we treat people differently because of it.

There is a study called "Blinded by Sight: Seeing Race Through the Eyes of the Blind". The researchers found that even people who never had sight still use visual representations of people, including a person's perceived racial or ethnic identity as a major marker for how they interact with them.<sup>3</sup> Once a blind person figures out a new acquaintance's race, they treat that person accordingly.

In our story the manager has mismanaged the property so badly that there's no choice but to fire him. I should put "fire" in quotes here because the manager is actually an oikonomos in Greek, which is a household steward, a slave. He won't be fired and free to look for another job. He will be demoted to manual labor or be put out of his household entirely.

The disgraced manager hatches a plan to make deals with his master's debtors, pay less but pay now. He makes this deal to open up some doors after he is fired. At the end of the story, the master praised the manager's dishonesty because he had acted shrewdly. Then, the writer of Luke had to polish up Jesus' story so it didn't look like Jesus is praising dishonest people for their actions. The manager made the debtors think he was the most generous and gracious person on the planet. If they thought that he was on their side, when the master fired him they would open their doors to him. The tenants thought they hit the jackpot.

Imagine that you are a tenant. The manager's actions set them free in a way they never could have imagined. His actions helped loosen the shackles of crippling debt and the anxiety that goes with it.<sup>4</sup> The mother who had her debt cut from 100 jugs of olive oil to 50 was able to breathe again for the first time in years. She could even give a little money to her parents so they didn't have to choose between medication and food. The father who had his debt from 100 containers of wheat to 80 was able to go to the store and buy shoes for his children. For the people who were helped, it didn't matter why the manager did what he did.

For the first time in his life, the manager wasn't concentrating on making as much money as possible, but on making as many friends as possible. He put relationships with neighbors above accumulation of wealth. Out of desperation, he turned to people instead of profit. That was a huge change, regardless of the why. Our amazing God is able to use our brokenness and make good come out of it. The manager's motivation was selfish, but his behavior was generous. God used that generosity to bring hope and new life into the lives of those tenant farmers. The crooked manager served God and God's purpose on accident. Lives were blessed and changed.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/john-wesley-on-giving>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/26/do-not-see-race-ignoring-racism-not-helping>

<sup>4</sup> <http://fourthchurch.org/sermons/2019/092219.html>

There are many times when our intentions aren't pure, when we look in the mirror and see a crooked manager staring back at us. In fact, I would say that most of the time when I help someone in need, I do so because it makes me feel good. Nothing we do will ever be done completely without self-interest. Part of why we are generous and why we get involved in working for justice is because it makes us feel good, and that is okay. This story tells me that is in fact good news. In spite of lousy motivation and self-centered actions, God's grace and mercy is still at work in what we do. We will make a difference for good in God's world because of what God can and will do, even through crooked managers, even through us. We won't ever get it completely right, but God still uses us to bring hope and new life in this world.

Here in this place, we have ministries to offer, missions to be fulfilled, people to be served, and lives to be transformed. I am thankful for your generosity that allows all of those things to happen. Thanks be to God. Amen.