

Whose Money is it Anyway?

Year C: Pentecost 16: Luke 16:1-13
King of Glory Lutheran Church
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Today's texts are a parable and a moral. The context of the parable helps us to understand its meaning. God calls us to be faithful because all we have is God's... not ours!

There is a comedy show on TV that makes we laugh. Five professional comedians get together for a show called; *Whose Line is it Anyway?* It's a game show where the points don't matter and no one ever wins.

The facilitator and the audience throw out categories for the five comedians to improvise on. On the spot they make up songs. They pretend and act out scenarios. The viewer never knows what is going to get said next. Now there are actual rules that help make improvisation work. Yet, for those of us watching, it appears seamless and hilarious as at a seconds notice. The category might be cows and then all of a sudden, we're hearing about purple mohawks! (It's not completely without innuendos, so viewer discretion is advised!)

Whose line is it anyway?
Whose money is it anyway?

The parable just read from Luke 16 sounds strange to our ears. Why does Jesus appear to side with, and then applaud a manager who cooks the books? Why does this dishonest manager offer one discount for wheat, but another for oil? Why might the owner congratulate the actions of his dishonest manager? And then, Jesus tells us to be faithful? Whose line is it anyway?

Well, as you already know, the context of a particular parable is important. Jesus tells stories about grapes and sheep because everybody drank wine and there were flocks roaming every hillside! What is happening behind the scenes, first century Jews would have immediately understood and we don't.

Jesus' hearers would have known immediately when they hear a story about a master and a slave – an owner and a manager – that story was about God and the people of Israel. God and God's covenantal people.

There is also a crisis coming. In 70 AD the temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed by Rome. Rome will come and crush the center of faith and life for the Jews. They will lose land and identity. Their center of worship will be gone. What will they do? Will they be ready? Where will they live?

Back briefly to the parable. Don't ever try to take parables completely literally. And here's what we do know!

No Jew was allowed to earn interest off of money. The way they got around it was to exchange in kind commodities – wheat and oil. Furthermore, the owner probably had already increased the prices to make some interest. So this 'dishonest manager' likely brings the goods back to their original cost – thus not forcing the owner to admit his own guilt. How creative! No wonder the owner commends him!

Jesus' hearers would have understood God to be the owner and themselves to be the dishonest manager. Jesus is saying they are the ones who cook the books and cuts people's bills down in order to save the owner's skin.

Through the parable, Jesus is saying to them, look "You have not been faithful with what God has given you. When Rome comes to demolish, you might lose it all and what shall you do? You, Children of the Light, aren't as creative as other Children of the World who can manipulate and navigate times of crisis. With Rome staring you down the barrel, its time perhaps, Israel, to make friends with uncommon bedfellows. Don't follow more rules – it's time to think outside the box. That might be your survival in days to come."

Whose money is it anyway?

Whose money is it anyway? Is money like a comedy improvisational routine where we can throw it around for the next person to catch? Is money like shares we can write off on our taxes or sell on the stock exchange to make more? Is money that stuff we hid under the mattress so that we never lose it and we'll always have it? Do we hoard it or share it? Do we own money, or does money own us?

Do you remember the comedian Jack Benny? He made being cheap a part of his acts. So a man walks up to Benny on the street, puts a gun in his ribs and says, "Your money or your life?"

There was a very long pause while Benny adopted that trademark posed of chin in hand, fingers drumming against his cheek. The mugger jabbed him with the gun and demanded again, “Your money or your life.” Benny replied, “I’m thinking! I’m thinking!”

Whose money is it anyway?

So we have a parable in tonight’s text, and now we get to the moral of the story. Be faithful. Be faithful in little. When we are, we’re faithful in much.

What God has given to us: family, health, work, finances, all of this – all which God has given us is pure gift. *It is not ours to own, all of those blessings are on loan from God.* God has entrusted all sorts of wealth in a trust fund – trusting we will use it wisely. Our wealth is not ours. Wealth belongs to God. Whose money is it anyway?

God’s! Not ours! Now if we really believe that, this understanding can transform our whole lives. Not my house. God’s home. Not my car. God’s gift of transportation. Not my possessions. God’s possessions to be used for God’s glory. Not my children. God’s children on loan to me for a brief period of time to form and shape and raise with Godly values.

Whose money is it anyway? Yes it all belongs to God!

If God has put our homes in our hands to care for, then we’ll not let our properties get run down. If God has entrusted us children to raise, then perhaps we enlist God more in our parenting responsibilities. If God has given us skills to earn money, then we understand we’re called to share it with others.

The moral of Jesus’ story is to be faithful – in little and in much.

So we shall be faithful. We can be faithful to God with our bank accounts. We shall be faithful to God in our marriages. Faithful in our work lives. Faithful in how we use time. Faithful in relationships. Faithful in caring for others as much as we care for ourselves.

True story. Years ago, a woman was panicking at an airport. Her mother had to get down the concourse to a flight, and she and her own daughter had to get to their own gate.

The grandmother refused to go on her own and time was getting short before their respective flights left. So the mom said to her young daughter, “Sweetheart, you stay right here while I go take Grandma to her gate.” (This was in the day and age when security wasn’t what it is now. And stranger danger didn’t exist much either.)

To which the Grandmother yelled in front of everyone, “You can’t leave Susie by herself! She won’t be ok!”

To which a male voice, answered, “Oh yes, she’ll be ok. I’ll stay with her.”

The mother turned around and there stood Joe DiMaggio. And he stooped down and said, “Hi Susie. I’m going to stay with you until your mom gets back.”

(Dr. Mary-Claire King told this story on The Moth, September 20, 2019 on NPR. I changed the name of the daughter RAL.) <https://themoth.org/radio-hour/the-moth-at-the-world-science-festival>

True story! Joe stayed and laughed and played with the young girl.

Whose daughter is it anyway? God’s and ours to care for.

Whose money is it anyway?

How we answer that question can change our whole lives!

Thanks be to God!

Amen