“***Faithful in a Little***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, September 22, 2019

**Luke 14:7-11**

7 When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. 8”When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; 9and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, “Give this person your place”, and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place.10But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. 11For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

**Luke 16:10–13**

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. 11If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 12And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? 13No 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.”

At first glance, these two Luke passages don’t have much to do with each other, although both are moral teachings given directly, and not in the form of parables. One is about being humble instead of asserting yourself and being a social climber. The other is about being faithful over small tasks, so that you can be entrusted with bigger tasks.

But if we look closer, we will see that they both have to do with knowing what really counts, which is not self or ego. That’s obvious in the first passage, where we are not to claim the seat of honor, because honor, if it is due to you, will be given. You should trust the host, because the host knows just how much honor you should have. Even more fundamental than “be humble” is the message “trust your host.” So this instruction does, after all, have a parable, that is, a *story*, wrapped up within it. Trusting the host means trusting God. There was a boy who seriously wanted to get on a baseball team. He practiced and practiced and finally made it on, but when the season began, he found that he was second string, and got very little playing time. He was distressed, and he told his mom. She said not to worry, to just keep doing what he was doing. The coach was fair, and would notice that he was working hard and steadily improving. And that is what happened. He got noticed and was starting games by the end of the season.

Now the second instruction is about *trustworthiness*, rather than *trusting*, but the two are linked. He says you should learn to be faithful and honest in caring for another person’s riches, even if it seems to be a minor matter. It’s *not* minor when it comes to assessing your character. The wealthy person who *reads* your character might be ready to entrust you with something huge and important. The key is to be honest, responsible, and diligent. If we are responsible in protecting someone else’s riches, we will be entrusted with more. Now I have to say that this also contains a sort of story, or a hidden parable, within it, because the unnamed person who will entrust riches to you has to be God. And it’s not really about riches, but responsibilities. If you are honest in meeting your obligations, God will entrust you with “true riches,” that is, greater responsibilities.

So it turns out that even when Jesus is giving a moral instruction, it may contain a story concealed within it. And his stories always get you to think about God, and God’s *way*. Here he gets us to think about being humble and trusting our host, and then he wants us to commit to being honest in little as well as big things—to be fundamentally honest and trustworthy.

There was a young man who was working in the State Division of Forestry in California. He was climbing and topping trees. He was finishing his time there, and was going to transfer to another forestry camp. Before leaving he was told by the guy in charge of equipment that he should take a pair of climbing spurs, for himself. The guy insisted the State had plenty, and that it was okay. But the young man thought about it, but said no. They weren’t his to take. In the new camp, this young man was entrusted to be leader over a work crew, which *did* come with responsibility, since this was dangerous work. He had refused to take advantage of his previous position, and he was given a higher trust.

At the end of the second story, Jesus says we must make sure that our real loyalty is to God and God’s ways, and not money. Money doesn’t talk, it swears. The love of money and power leads to the worst of human cruelty and dishonesty, including the lies that people tell to *themselves* to justify their bad choices. You can’t do it—You can’t serve God and mammon. Choosing mammon is like grabbing the highest seat at a banquet. You can’t seize prestige. You can’t grab humility. Further, you can’t bully your way into being recognized as trustworthy. You have to quietly and privately—and *repeatedly*—commit yourself to actually *being* trustworthy. It is the choices you make in your secret heart that will be manifest to others and to God. You will either be called to the higher seat, or you will not. You can’t promote yourself, but you might be promoted.

Now this only works imperfectly in the material world. But it always works on the spiritual level. God always recognizes your value. So work for him! You cannot serve God and money. But God is a much more fair and reliable master.