

St Pius & St Anthony 25th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C(2025) Luke

When I was a kid, we often played tabletop board games (the parents may have been in on them, but usually not, as they had their own preferences for games that we kids avoided. They liked Yahtzee, Boggle, or Rook (never figured that out) like Bridge. But we kids would pull out the boxes of Sorry, Connect Four, Battleship, or Life. Our favorite was Monopoly – but there were challenges to overcome, before getting a game of Monopoly going. First we had to fight over who got which player piece – the dog was the favorite, then the race car, but who wanted to be a thimble, or a shoe or a wheelbarrow? Then we had to determine who would be the banker and then exactly how much money we were supposed to start out with. Here is where I am going with this story, but it wasn't until later as I got wiser, that I began to see that most of the time, the winner of the game also happened to be the person serving as 'banker'! (I'm not saying, but it seems more than a coincidence!) Keep an eye on the money!

Which brings us to the easily misunderstood parable and commentary by Jesus in the gospel today. What exactly is being taught about money and business, if anything? The parable and Jesus' comment afterward seem to commend 'fudging the numbers' or 'keeping two sets of books'. Could that be? I suggest that it is not that at all. Jesus' apparent wink or nod toward the fired steward's prudence, nor his comment about the prudence of 'children of this world' neither, of those indicate that Jesus is advocating a bullish 'do anything to take-it-all' Wall Street approach. No He is only indicating that they are just trying to save their own skins (creative about surviving). No, again, I hear Jesus saying that we should not be selfishly amassing in resources like dollars, stocks & products as our **security**, but rather we should be spreading resources out, far and wide among others, increasing our contacts with people and investing in eternity that way-thru them (like the Amish insurance program that doesn't amass lots of money in the bank, but rather lots of friends and helping hands to call in, and come together to rebuild the barn after a fire – the investment is in people to count on coming out to help, and not just a lump sum payout from accumulated money set back. The investment is in the people, trust in them and their care).

So let's look a little closer at the parable. I bet the owner wishes that instead of alerting his manager early on, that he was being fired, that he instead just asked for the keys/books and immediately escorted him out of the building. It might be revelatory of the greed of the owner that his final demand of him, for the manager to prepare a final audit was the owner trying to squeeze a little more work out of him. Mistake! Because the manager wizens up and takes time to straighten up the books and take with him what he can. What did he do? Luke 16:6-7 says he writes down their bills, making out ne, lower invoices for the customers, reducing their debts. We hear about two examples of some sales of

wheat and olive oil, but Luke 16:5 goes on to say that he called in the owner's '**debtors one by one**'. He surely had more than those two customers! So his shrewd move could significantly add up over the whole customer base. Some people ask about his actions, "What is he doing, is this further cheating on his behalf, faking new invoices?" But it can't be more fraud, for why would the owner 'commend' him calling him prudent' (recall he was firing him in the first place for 'squandering'). So, if its not fraud, what is he doing?

Many scripture scholars make sense of this business action, by saying that the steward is 'coming clean' about his own exorbitant commissions that he always added to bills as handling fees or surcharges (grift). So, by subtracting his own cut (*and he wasn't going to be around to collect it over time from the owner anyway*), he could do a favor discounting everyone's bills for them before he left. (*maybe a court case could've been made that he had criminally overcharged the customers to begin with, but another indication that he wasn't defrauding the owner now by writing down the bills, we know the owner is demanding- so if it was fraud, the owner could easily have thrown wight around and had the man dragged to court-as we heard about in a Jesus story back in Lk 12:59*).

So it looks like the manager is just eliminating his own 'portion' of the bill. Now that explanation accounts for the creative steward's actions, ruling out that they were fraudulent, but still some people are troubled by Jesus' seeming approval of 'dishonesty' in worldly business when He goes on, commenting that "*children of this world are more prudent dealing with their own than are the children of light-- therefore make friends for yourselves with 'dishonest wealth'*". What? Is Jesus encouraging 'dishonesty'? No, the hang-up here is the misleading translation of the words 'dishonest wealth'. It is better translated '*deceptive* wealth'. It is not wealth gotten through dishonesty, but the wealth's own dishonesty as it promises what it never delivers. Jesus is making a statement about the ***fleeting and illusory nature of this world's wealth and security***. It's destined to disappoint us and not last. The dishonesty is that it is not genuine. It is in no way a long-term investment (as in eternity long view). If your portfolio is full of 'this world's resources', you are headed for a bankruptcy-crash eventually, as we know it won't make it out of this world! Again, Jesus' actual exhortation is "to make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth, so that **when** it fails, you will be welcomed into ***eternal*** dwellings"(Lk 16:9) About this, 'deceptive wealth', notice Jesus says, "**WHEN** it fails" not **IF**. It is going to fail, it is not going with you and won't help us past our last breath here. It is not lasting, not eternal. (This world's market is always up today and down tomorrow, every boom followed by a bust, and easy come easy go). So this world's wealth is not transferrable to eternity. Jesus is saying that all worldly resources need to be applied/used for the building up of what goes on past here, what is beyond this life – and that would be the stuff of relationships, our spirit-soul, our relationship to God and to God's

image in other people. We should invest in divine interpersonal wealth (make eternal friends-spend it Upward-on other people's good) – my eternal retirement portfolio should be full of stock like 'What I did here on earth to generously assist other people' and 'What I did here on earth loving God in my neighbor'. This is true heavenly investment, a spiritual, eternal wealth! Jesus is commending the 'social capital' aspect of human business and commercial exchange – the whole idea of networking, and spreading it around (like the commercial 'I need others, I need Indeed'-it's the people). That is business really working - the relationships.

When i think of how this manager realizes he needs people and relationships, it reminds me of the old 1980's TV show 'Equalizer', the original one (before Denzel Washington or Queen Latifah)), with British actor Edward Woodward as Robert McCall, who was a disillusioned Covert intel operative who left the agency, and spent his life helping people out of jams (*'all odds against them-he equalized the odds*). So he'd get them helped, and every episode at the end, they'd offer pay to him and he'd refuse saying, *"I don't want your money, but I may call one day and ask a favor of you"*. He was investing in what goes forward – the call back, the relationship that goes on. It's not the cash, but the contact that repays us long-term-eternally. The owner in the parable saw his business as paper accounts, and numbers, but the manager knew the greater resource was the business of people, the personal lives of customers. So the manager bought into them by writing off his excessive commissions. His retirement was investing in them-the relationships. And that is a heavenly plan.