

September 18

Luke 16:1-13

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. ²So 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.’ ³Then 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. ⁴I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’ ⁵So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ ⁷Then 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.’ ⁸And 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. ⁹And 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. 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.”

SERMON

Having been to exactly one rap concert in a coffee house, I quote a line that might fit today's parable and definitely impressed me. "Hustle the struggle before the struggle hustles you."

Jesus tells a story about someone expecting the pink slip. He decides to collect on debts at a fraction of their face value so at least he'll have friends when he gets fired.

People who hear Jesus' story might have been surprised that for once the rigged game doesn't favour the one who was already winning.

The lovely pyramids in Egypt were built with slave labour. Pharaoh's gimmick was to compel slaves produce more brick with less clay and straw—do more with less. Sound familiar?

Remember the story about manna? When would be entrepreneurs cooked up a scheme to control the supply chain and charge prices, manna rotted. As Pastor Daniel Erlander, bless his memory writes, "Hoarding stinks".

The words of the prophet are a direct critique of a system that closely resembles the sharecropping system that kept former slaves captive to wealthier land owners.

You're not shocked there are plenty of hustles going on in the world here and now...Red lining where housing values and access to bank loans varies by the racial composition of a neighbourhood is a hustle. Payday loans with interest rates over 150 percent are a hustle.

I admit to a strong personal bias when I quote annual analysis of CEO pay by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). They found that the 100 highest-paid chief executives of S&P/TSX (stock exchanges) listed firms were paid 227 times more than the average Canadian worker.

The increase – based on 2018 figures as the most recent year available – was a sharp rise from 197 in the previous year.

“Put another way, by 10:09 a.m. on January 2, the average top CEOs will have made as much money as the average Canadian worker will make all year. That’s the earliest time on record in the 13 years we’ve been tracking these numbers,” said report author and CCPA Senior Economist David Macdonald.

Enough already. I’m a preacher, not an economist. I remind you the very first scripture Jesus reads in synagogue proclaims good news for the poor and liberation for the captive. Jesus reads and then announces that these words are fulfilled even as they echo in our ears.

This preacher also reminds you that our catechism teaches that the phrase in the Lord’s Prayer “thy will be done on earth as in heaven” means our hearts are changed and our values shift to align with God’s loving agenda for all people—and a special care for those who have the deck stacked against them.

The parable invites us to reflect and imagine. How many systems are we stuck in or how many benefit us while harming others? What would happen if for once the rigged games worked to help those most vulnerable?

Might the church learn something here? Might we somehow use our abundance to enrich those around us?

Maybe you heard on the news about Yvon Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia, a California manufacturer of outdoor clothes, gear and accessories for skiing, climbing and camping. The prayer resource called the Daily Office tells the story this way:

The company is 50 years old and worth \$3 billion, but Chouinard is giving all the voting stock to a nonprofit trust “dedicated to fighting the environmental crisis and defending nature.” He says he never wanted to be a businessman, that he got into it to make climbing gear for himself and his friends; throughout the company’s history it has promoted environmental causes. “Instead of extracting value from nature and transforming it into wealth for investors, we’ll use the wealth Patagonia creates to protect the source of all wealth,”

The church can learn something from Mssr. Chouinard even if we don’t totally get the parable about the manager’s bargain basement loan forgiveness scheme.

How might we bless the neighbourhood we live in—and find ourselves serving God in the process?