A Sermon on Luke 16:1-13

On Sunday, 21 September 2025 By The Reverend Ruth Li

Today's Gospel, Luke 16:1-13, presents us with a powerful parable about a steward, the Shrewd Manager, who is accused of wasting his master's possessions. Facing dismissal, he acts wisely to secure his future. The story is filled with intrigue, challenge, and—most importantly—deep truth about our relationship with God, wealth, and the world.

After listening to the parable, we might stumble over the apparent praise of this manager's dishonesty. But as with many of Jesus' parables, the message is deeper than it first seems. Jesus is not telling us to be dishonest, nor is he suggesting we manipulate others for personal gain. Instead, he points to the shrewdness, the practical wisdom, of the manager, and invites us to consider how we, as God's people, are called to be wise and faithful stewards of what has been entrusted to us. It's similar to how St. Augustine, in his Sermon 359, wrestles with this, noting that "the Lord did not praise his fraud, but his prudence." The steward, facing imminent loss, acts decisively for his future, even if through questionable means. The parable is not an endorsement of dishonesty but a call to spiritual vigilance and wise stewardship.

Jesus' comments on this shrewd manager are very important. Here is what he said, "For the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light." (Luke 16:8) This is a sobering indictment. As St. Augustine notes, Jesus challenges his followers: "Why is it that those who pursue the things of this world show such cunning, such focus, such determination—while those entrusted with the light of God's kingdom sometimes stumble, hesitate, or lack vision?"

Jesus continues, saying, "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." (Luke 16:9) The message is not to buy friendship or manipulate others, but to invest resources in serving others, building community, and living generously—so that our lives focus on eternity and the values of God's kingdom.

Jesus uses "little" and "much" images to include us all as the manager: "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?" (Luke 16:10-12) The heart of the matter here is: We are all managers—not the owners—of the resources, time, relationships, and opportunities God places in our care. Whether we have much or little, what matters is our faithfulness.

The world often measures success by accumulation and control, but Jesus teaches that true success is about stewardship—how we use what we have, not just for ourselves, but for the good of others and the glory of God.

Worldly wealth is temporary. It will one day slip away through our fingers, whether by circumstance, time, or death. But there are "true riches"—the riches of God's love, the treasure of grace, the inheritance of the saints, and the joy of God's presence through each Sunday's gathering to worship God and surround the altar and our daily prayers. If we are careless, dishonest, or self-serving with what is fleeting, how can we expect to be entrusted with what is eternal? Are we mindful that we must one day give account to the divine Master?

This parable reminds us to hold money and possessions lightly, to be wise but not enslaved, and to use our resources for purposes greater than ourselves.

Jesus concludes with clear firmness: "No slave can serve two masters… You cannot serve God and wealth." (Luke 16:13) The world is full of conflicting loyalties. Money is a powerful force—it can promise security, status, influence, and pleasure. But it is a harsh master, never satisfied, always demanding more—more and endless more.

St. Basil the Great, in his Homily on Social Justice, writes, "The bread you store belongs to the hungry; the cloak you lock away belongs to the naked; the silver you bury belongs to the needy." Basil's words reflect the deeper lesson of the parable: worldly possessions are fleeting, but the love and mercy we give last forever.

God calls us to an undivided heart. We are invited to serve God, to find our identity in Christ, and to let all else—wealth, success, possessions—find their place as tools, not idols. The stewardship we practice in everyday life is the proving ground for greater responsibilities.

Applying the parable in our daily lives, honest and wise stewards exemplify the traits of our new life. No matter how much or how little we have, we should handle it with integrity and creativity. Think about how our resources can bless others, promote justice, build community, and reflect God's character. We need to continue building our eternal relationships, for example, by using our time, energy, and resources to cultivate genuine love and fellowship. When wealth fades, the bonds of kindness and grace endure.

Faithfulness and loyalty are the fruits of Christian life. As baptized people, we gather together around the Altar, receiving the Lord's body and blood with allegiance. Do not let the money cover our minds and eyes. Be prudent, generous, and unwavering in loyalty to our heavenly Master.
Live generously. In God's kingdom, generosity is never wasted. Sow seeds of mercy, support those in need, and give cheerfully, knowing that we are storing up treasures in heaven.

Dear brothers and sisters, today's parable of the dishonest manager is not a puzzle meant to confuse us but a mirror reflecting our stewardship of God's gifts. The Lord wants us to see it as a call to prudence, generosity, and unwavering loyalty to our heavenly Master. Let us be wise as serpents but innocent as doves, using earthly possessions to prepare for the joys of eternal heavenly life.
May we, with the grace of God, the counsel of the saints, and our devoted prayers, be found faithful stewards, ready to give account not with fear but with joy.