

Taking it to the Bank  
17 Pentecost C

*HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE SERVANTS OF OTHERS. TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM, OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM, AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE. AMEN!*

What's in your wallet? What holds the highest value for your life?

Last Sunday's gospel dealt with lost coins and how a person will search and search until they are found. God pursues his lost sheep as he does his people when they are lost and he pursues the one lost sinner until found. These next two Sundays continue with that theme of pursuing after what is valuable. People one way or another pursue those things in their life that they believe have intrinsic worth. We chase after what most attracts us.

The Collect of the Day prays, "Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure." We pray that every year. Are we any less anxious about earthly things than last year? If Christian life has any merit then are we less and less concerned with earthly things? After all, Christians are heaven bound. Does being a Christian make any difference when it comes to managing the heavenly things God has given us? How do you see it?

A mathematician, an accountant and an economist apply for the same job.

The job interviewer calls in the mathematician and asks, "What does two plus two equal?"

The mathematician replies, "Four."

The interviewer asks, "Four exactly?"

The mathematician looks at the interviewer with disbelief and says,

“Yes, four exactly.”

Then the interviewer calls in the accountant and asks the same question: “What does two plus two equal?” The accountant says, “On average, four — give or take 10 percent — but on average, four.”

Then the interviewer calls in the economist and poses the same question: “What does two plus two equal?”

The economist gets up, locks the door, closes the shade, sits down next to the interviewer, and says, “What do you want it to equal?”

Trying to force a comparison between apples and oranges is like insisting that our earthly treasures are worth the same as what God has invested in you and me. “What do you want it to equal?” In Jesus Christ God invested his eternal value into our souls and we cannot put a price on it. That’s tough to reckon with. Are we fully convinced of our true net worth? I’m not convinced. And I believe that the church has the only keys to unlock that faith.

It happens that our earthly life goes sour and we want to try to make up the difference with more of the distractions and subtractions that take away the abundant life we as Christians claim. Are we as shrewd as the dishonest manager to pursue things heavenly as we go about the business of each day? Do we pursue the things that truly matter with all of our wits and energy? It’s as much a moral thing for Christians as was the decision of the dishonest manager to swindle his boss of rental payments.

The dishonest manager of Jesus parable did what any 21<sup>st</sup> century landlord might be tempted to do: cover his butt. He was providing a retirement home for himself when his boss finally caught up with him. He was banking that his friends would remember what he did for them when it came to payback time. He seems that he worked hard at striking a balance between his poor management skills and his desire to save himself.

What else can we learn from a parable whose lesson may seem to us a bit shaky?

If we who walk in God's light adopt the persistent initiative of the children of this age we will be much more bold and less timid about spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. We can no longer hide behind our mismanagement of God's treasures. We can no longer excuse ourselves as a dysfunctional family. Are we taking action to respond to God's greater initiative in sending Jesus to us with the gold and silver of his kingdom?

Another conclusion we can draw from this parable is that just as the manager resorted to drastic action to find a new place where he would be appreciated, so, too, drastic action is needed for us to be welcomed in the kingdom of God. No one likes the feeling of going to a home for a visit and being tolerated. If the direction we have been traveling is away from Christ, then it is time to take the initiative and make a drastic change in his direction. Repentance can be as radical and severe as surgery designed to save a life. Drastic measures are certainly for drastic circumstances. If intervention is what we need then by all means someone throw the life saver!

There's a story about a husband and wife who were out in their car on some errand, with the husband doing the driving. The wife was sitting at the other end of the bench seat, by the passenger door, and she was in a pensive mood. She said to her husband, "Remember when we were first dating? When we went anywhere in your old car, we sat as close together as we possibly could. Sometimes you even put your arm around me. What has happened to us? Our relationship doesn't seem as close as it used to."

The husband considered that, and then he said, "Well, I haven't moved."

We may think of God still sitting in the same place — and though we know he has not withdrawn from us — we feel some loss in the closeness. If that is so, then it's time for us to make the next move. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. You can take that to the bank! Amen.