

Sermon 2010 Pentecost 17
Text: Luke 16:1-15
Theme: "Money and Faith"
9-19-10

God talks about what money does and does not do many times in Scripture. Sometimes people complain about sermons that talk about money and I always say that I completely agree with them and if they can convince my boss to leave it alone, I certainly will! Today we hear about money from several different angles.

In Amos, God berates the people who are supposed to be his people but who are acting like crooks by cheating others at market. Now let's define crook. Many people define crook as one who breaks a human law. Hence we have a legal system that goes to great expense to determine if in fact a person is a crook or not. Is Rod Blagojevich a crook or not? What about Charles Manson? What about the guy who blew .11 on the breathalyzer and just happened to get caught in a checkpoint on Labor Day? For God, the concept is easy. Anyone who takes material advantage of another is a crook. It does not matter to God

whether I am within the legal limits of human law. If I am taking financial advantage of someone else, I am stealing from him and from God – see there's the rub.

We steal from God when we steal from others. All the money is God's. He gives it to us to manage but it is all his. So even if I am within my rights as a U.S. citizen, if I take something that is not mine, I steal from God.

Likewise, if I withhold Godly gifts, even if I am within my rights to do so, I am stealing from God. So I was told about a Lutheran Church recently where some people are angry over some decisions the leadership made with regard to the school so they are withholding their offerings. I personally would rather not steal from God. I would give my offerings and trust God to handle his Church.

In Timothy, the issue is directed toward people who are mismanaging God's gifts and using resources to point to themselves instead of God. Timothy talks first about appropriate worship and then addresses people in that

parish who are trying to take center stage either with their dress or with their attempts to usurp the pastor. Once again, God expects us to use our resources to glorify him, not ourselves.

Finally, in Luke, Jesus turns everything on its head. He tells a parable in which he praises the crooks. People must have walked away from that one wondering what in the world Jesus was doing. Now remember that this is a parable. As soon as Jesus says that it's a parable we know that he is making a spiritual point and not delivering financial advice. So we have to look deeper than the words themselves and ask, what is Jesus teaching?

Jesus praises the dishonest manager for being savvy with wealth because in the end that is all he will have. The point Jesus is making is that money is only one tool that God gives us and like all tools it can be used well or badly. What happens when you use a tool badly? Ever tried to use a power saw to trim your fingernails? That might not turn out too well. In fact you could end up hurt pretty

badly. The dishonest manager is using a tool for short term solutions instead of how it is meant to be used and he will accomplish his short term goal but in the end, he will lose his future. How many times is a church tempted to do the same thing? They sell property to pay monthly bills. They reduce ministry and praise themselves for having extra money in the bank. How many times are Christians tempted to do the same thing? They withhold giving and excuse themselves with justifications about how the church misuses money or how God expects them to take care of their family first. God gives us the tool and tells us how to use it. If we want the tool to accomplish that for which God gave it, ALWAYS, always, always, give back a portion to him. Give back something! God forgives sin and expects stupidity from us, but he calls us to be faithful managers and give back something to him. Don't ever tell me that you can't afford to give SOMETHING! Otherwise, I will be forced to come visit you and help you find things that you can do without in order to give

SOMETHING. What kind of manager are you being if you are going out to eat and giving God nothing? If you are buying coffee at Starbucks or renting movies and giving God nothing? How are you any different from the dishonest manager who used the Master's money to take care of himself? How are you any different from the women in Timothy's church who were using their money to adorn themselves instead of God? How are you any different from the merchants in Amos who were cheating others to get more money for themselves?

So, God's expectation is that we will use the money he allows us to manage like all the gifts he gives us for the good of others and for his glory. It is a difficult task to which he calls us but he does not leave us without means to accomplish it. This is why regular worship is so important. No one can even come close to being a faithful manager without the power God gives us in worship. He promises that through the Word and through the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit will enter us and empower us

to be faithful to him with our lives – not just with regard to money but certainly including money.

This place is where we receive forgiveness for our failures. It is where we receive nourishment for our souls. We walk out of this place refreshed and forgiven, and we start all over every week. The reason the dishonest manager was dishonest was that he felt he had no other recourse. He was all alone. You and I, on the other hand, have a master who forgives and teaches and empowers and never leaves us. Stay close to him and his word and you will be faithful, more this week than last and more next week than this. That is his promise. We become weak when we go off on our own and handle the problems “our way.” If we follow him, we will always be growing in Christ. AMEN