

Luke 16:1-13
Pentecost 15C

Oh, the love of money.

We come by it honestly, all of us.

It surfaces as part of our nature from the early days of childhood,
When we quickly pick up on the fact that the exchange of money
gets us something we like-- a new toy, or a ride on a ferris wheel, or
a treat.

My mom likes to tell the story of when she pulled into a 7 Eleven when I was young,

And I asked if we could get Slurpees,

And she said, "No, we don't have money for that today."

And I pointed to the ATM machine,

The illustration of hands on the front catching money
that seemingly just flew out of it.

I said, "But there's free money right there in
that machine! Just get some!"

It seemed so easy to me to acquire money,

And my relationship with money was already being formed.

Money thrills us,

It disappoints us,

It gives us the illusion of safety and comfort,

It determines what we are able to do,

Where we are able to live.

If I asked you how much you have in your bank account today,

You'd probably have a good idea,

If not an exact amount.

We are well aware of our money.

The parable Jesus tells today is a confusing one.

But there's no doubt it's about money and our relationship with it.

Author Brian McLaren reminds us of the historical context--

The Romans and the Roman economy was in charge here.

The rich people lived in the south, Judea.

The poor, the farmers with all the things the rich needed and
wanted--wheat, oil, wine--they lived in the north, Galilee.

And the rich bought the land from the farmers,
Allowing them to stay on the land as tenants and owing the rich the
proceeds from their land as rent.

The rich didn't want to travel all the way to the north to procure the goods they were
owed,

So they hired managers to do that for them.

And the managers were told to squeeze as much interest and extra as they could out of
the poor.

The particular manager in our parable today clearly wasn't making his boss happy,

And, Brian McLaren notes,

as a response to being fired, the manager decided to switch sides.

Instead of perpetuating the dishonest debt that was all about
grabbing more than necessary for the rich one,

The manager reduced the debt so that it was more fair to the
debtor, the poor one.

The manager saw the injustice,

And in his action,

Reversed the value system.

Previously placed on money and possessions acquired unfairly,

Now the value is placed on the person and what is fair to each one.

It's also helpful for us to remember where this parable is in the context of Luke's entire
Gospel.

Remember, last week, Pastor Lyle explored the "lost" parables with us--

The lost sheep, the lost coin,

Right after that comes the parable of the lost son--The Prodigal.

Then next week, we'll hear Jesus begin another parable with the same opener
we hear today: "There was a rich man."

It seems there is a connection between wandering and wealth,

Between being lost and being rich.

Not that they are connected exactly in that way,

But that they both reveal the nature of God's relationship with us,

And the value system within which God works.

We are wandering when we lose ourselves in our wealth and the pursuit of it.

And we are found by God just as we are--

Not according to our riches,

But according to God's grace and favor through Jesus Christ.

God values us.

God values our lives so deeply that God sent Jesus to save us from our sin,

Our selfishness,

Our love of wealth,

And wealth itself.

God has saved us from all of that,

And from death, too.

And has granted us eternal life with Christ.

Because God values us so deeply,

We value one another.

We lift up one another.

We seek the best for one another,

Even if it means we get less for ourselves in the end.

We do this not because we should,

But because we can,

We are freed to.

Because, as Jesus says, we cannot live any other way.

The very last line of our Gospel this morning speaks this clearly:

“You cannot serve God and wealth.”

You cannot.

Jesus doesn't say, “You should not.”

He says, “You cannot.”

It is not possible for those whom God has called and claimed to serve God and to serve wealth.

Our baptism changes us.

The body and blood of Christ transforms us.

We live in God's value system now,

And we value God's mercy, forgiveness, protecting the weak and the poor.

We value relationship, justice, love, and grace.

Not our wealth.

We simply cannot serve wealth when we know how God values us. . .

And all of God's people.

You may have seen the pretty amazing story this week about a 24 year-old football fan named Carson King,

And his poster asking for donations to replenish his supply of Busch Light beer.
He held up the poster to ESPN TV cameras, not thinking it would actually get much air time.

It was largely a joke,
Just to see what might happen.

But within 30 minutes, King had received \$400 in donations.

Not long after, as the donations kept coming,

King decided and announced on Twitter that anything over the cost of that one case of beer he had originally asked for,

He would donate to the University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital.

King quickly realized that what started out as a funny attention grabber was turning into something much bigger--

And so much more meaningful.

When Anheuser-Busch and Venmo got wind of what King was doing,

Both companies committed to matching whatever amount of money was raised!

Current totals reveal that over \$820,000 will be donated to the children's hospital in Iowa.

Over \$820,000 dollars,

Coming from all over the country.

It's so. . .easy.

Money given freely,

Joyfully,

To help some of the most vulnerable among us.

What was initially intended for merely personal enjoyment,

Became a re-orienting of values,

Not just for Carson King,

But for a community of donors all over the country.

This story, a modern-day parable, celebrates the good that money can do.

The good that people can do. . .God's people can do. . .

With money.

It makes me wonder, why do we ever hold our money back?

In the King James and other older Biblical translations,

The word used for “wealth” in the Gospel today is “Mammon.”

Professor Barbara Rossing suggests that we’ve lost something by changing the word to “wealth” in our translations today.

Mammon is an evil personification of wealth and possessions.

Which makes wealth something that has legs.

That has teeth.

That stands in front of us,

Blocking our view of everything else,

But what we want our wealth to do for us.

But when we give freely and lovingly and joyfully,

Our wealth also gets personified.

It grows legs as it moves towards those in need,

It has teeth that grab hold of a new purpose for it,

A new power found in its use.

Instead of standing in our way,

Our wealth can stand up for others.

Our wealth is personified when it becomes a gift,

A representation of Jesus reaching out,

Giving all,

Offering himself for the lost,

The wandering,

The wealthy,

The poor. . .

Who are all bound up in the same
promise,

Who are all found by the same
Jesus Christ,

Who are all valued,

And loved,

And saved.

We are a people re-oriented into God’s value system.

We already live in it,

May we give in it, too.