

Sunday between 18<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> September [25]

Luke 16:1-13

The Gospel reading for this week is concerned with honesty and dishonesty and issues of trust. It is also a continuation of Jesus' teaching on managing wealth and our relationship with God. In lots of ways this is not a controversial subject, most of us can hear this teaching and recognise that it is wrong to cheat and be dishonest in our dealings with other people. It is a bad idea to live dishonest lives because our society has been designed to seek out dishonesty and punish it as an example to the perpetrator and to others who might go that way in the future.

It is in our interests not to be dishonest as if we are found out we are likely to face some kind of anger from the one wronged. But what if we can get away with it? What if it is not likely that we will get caught? What if there were no chance that we would get found out for our dishonesty?

Our humanity looks to gain advantage because we want to live lives where we are in control and if we are to be in control we need to earn plenty of money and make our own way, that's how the logic of the world works, that's how our society functions. It takes only one small step to think we need to make more money by whatever means necessary to have us stepping over the very thin grey line that often separates right and wrong, honesty and dishonesty, and yet there is something in our gut, a feeling that we have, that makes us uncomfortable, that stops us crossing that line. It is the knowledge that being honest is not only about how other people respond to us, it is about our relationship with God.

In the Gospel reading Jesus teaches us that those that cannot be trusted with the little things, also cannot be trusted with big things, honesty matters to God and it should matter to us too. The root of dishonesty lies in human greed and a constant attempt to ensure we maintain control and advantage over the path of our lives, Jesus reminds us that this is foolish and corrupting. Those famous and hard-hitting words, you cannot serve both God and money. He couldn't have made it plainer. We have to be aware of where we are putting our faith, where our trust lies.

If we trust only ourselves then we need to follow the ways of the world and make provision for our lives. This will mean putting the acquisition of wealth first, without money we cannot buy the things we need when our focus is having things to fulfil our lives ambitions. Yet, if we have different priorities, if we are truly serving God, if we keep that image of Jesus walking on water in our minds and accept that there is where we ought to put our trust, in the one who can make even the storm submit to his command, we can let go of those worldly ways.

That is not to say that serving God means you never have money, it just means you are not controlled by money, you are not obsessed by it. We all live in a world where we use currency to live and have possessions, yet as Christians we are called to always remember the true value of things. To keep in perspective short term gain in the light of eternity.

There are sometimes lovely stories in the news, and a memorable one was in follow up to an event that occurred in the US a little while ago. A homeless man was commended for his honesty when, having found an unattended backpack which contained somewhere in the region of \$60,000 US in a mixture of cash and travellers cheques, immediately handed the bag into a police station intact. The man could easily have taken the \$10,000 cash and dumped the bag without anyone knowing what he had done. But he chose to do the honest thing and took nothing.

The follow up story, was that on hearing of this man's honesty, and knowing that he was homeless and in need, an individual elsewhere in the US set up a website where donations could be left in response to this story. The total grew to over \$100,000 US.

Remember that bit of scripture we often hear, "consider the lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these"... well you may remember those beautiful verses end by Jesus reminding us not to be greedy and obsessed by the material things, "your heavenly father knows that you need them, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things will be added to you."

This news story was truly scripture in action, don't you think? This man, when questioned about his honesty said, "I am a religious man and Jesus has always made sure I have what I need." This is the faith we should strive for, a faith that sees us choosing righteous and Godly actions over personal reward. Call it delayed gratification, if you like, following God's path now, putting our faith in Jesus, the stiller of storms rather than trying to control the storms in our lives, will all lead us to a future with God, and there can be no better thing in which to put our trust than that. Amen.