Text: Luke 16:1-15

**Introduction**

Maybe I chose the wrong week to be out of town for a couple of days. What today’s gospel lesson was came up on Tuesday. You don’t have a gathering of preachers without most of them at least in the back of their heads worrying about the next Sunday. Because I was absolutely certain it was the Parable of the Prodigal. I was sure we were to finish Luke 15. My head had been working on that sermon since last Sunday afternoon. So when we looked it up and saw Luke 16 – the Unrighteous Manager – a parable that routinely baffles everyone who reads its. At least I was already behind the clock.

I’m not going to stand here and tell you that a parable that has baffled the best interpreters of scripture probably since Jesus uttered it, I’ve got the eternal key to. And I’m still not sure if this parable isn’t a 2000 year practical joke by the disciples on all preachers. After all they received and recorded the explanation from Jesus to the parable of the soils and some others. Why not give us this one? Unless it was to sit up in heaven and laugh at what the ages came up with. But I do think there is one obvious key that everyone shies away from because of a fear of associating Jesus with something maybe distasteful.

**Text**

Let me start with something that Jesus says about himself. “No one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Lk. 10:22 ESV). Part of what Jesus came to do was reveal the Father.

Let me expand upon that a bit. And I’m sorry, I’m just going to do it by assertion. It’s an assertion that comes from a lifetime of reading the scriptures. Isreal and all of mankind’s interaction with God has always been with the 2nd person of the Trinity – the Son. When Israel meets and talks with the Angel of the LORD, who morphs into simply The LORD, who gives his name – “Yahweh, I AM” – out of the burning bush, it’s the Son. Now wherever God is, all of God is there. Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. But thinking about the persons, it is the Son that mankind has always interacted with. The Apostle John is pretty clear about that. As clear as John is about anything. “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (Jn. 1:18 ESV)” That’s from the prolog of his gospel that usually gets read on Christmas. And if you translate it as a Trinitarian. “No one has ever seen the Father, the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” John would again assert something similar in his first letter. “No one has ever seen God.” Again it is probably better, “no one has ever seen The Father.” Because John of all the gospel writers leans into the divinity of Jesus. But he continues that we can know the Father because his love abides in us and because the Spirit.

And I know this is the type of stuff that hurts the head, I’m sorry. But it is also the stuff that the creeds ponder. God the Father – creator. The source of all things. Begotten of the Father before all worlds – the Son. Proceeding from the Father and the Son – the Spirit. The Love of God flows from the unseen Father, to the Son, and to the Spirit – and through them to us. And everything that comes from the Father returns to the Father. And the Son came to perfectly reveal the Father. We might not see the Father. No one but the Son has seen the Father. But in Jesus we have seen him.

And the biggest thing about the Father that Jesus wants us to know is that He is love. We are never outside of the Love of the Father. Even if we find our lives going to crap. Even in the midst of suffering and crosses. We are not outside of the love of the Father. And we have no idea of the depth of that Love. Our only glimpse of that depth is that He send his only son to save sinners. We who were in open rebellion. We who would kill the only son. God sent him anyway. To recall those who might hear. To save those who might be given sight.

And so turning to the parable, I think the meaning is about learning about the depth of the love of the Father. What we know is the law. It is written on our hearts after all. We know we are sinners. We know that we’ve done nothing with this gift of life. “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that his man was wasting his possessions.” Guilty as charged. And our law based understanding of the rich man who owns is all is that we are in deep trouble. “Turn in the account of you management, for you can no longer be manager.” Defend your life so to speak. And we all know that we will come up short in that defense. “What shall I do?”

**Christology**

And by the time most of us come to this realization, “we are not strong enough to dig, and we are ashamed to beg.” Maybe we’ve been digging our entire lives and we’ve just come to the realization that my back is gone and we can’t work our way out of the law. Maybe we think of the Rich man like another parable – “He reaps where he does not sow.” Maybe we’ve only lately felt the weight of the law. And just staring at the pile become overwhelmed. Like someone said go move Camelback Mountain. And we had never heard something as strange as “If you have faith of a mustard seed you could tell the mountain to be thrown into the sea.”

The law has a solid way of thinking. Faith has a completely different way. If we are thinking about the law, the mountain never moves. My back is always terrible and not up to the task. Now we could always beg. And Luther’s last words aren’t wrong. “We are all beggars.” We beg in these petitions that God’s Kingdom would come to us also. But the nature of faith is that before we can even ask, it has been done for us. Jesus wasn’t plan B. God doesn’t do plan B. He made it all good. And what he made good will return good. It all returns through Christ. As John would say it was all made through him. And yes sin makes things ugly. But God has taken care of that. We are all made part of his Son. We have been covered by his blood. We have the indwelling of the Spirit. We are invited into that divine life. And it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you this. It was prepared before the foundation of the world.

Like in all of our negotiations with God, we sell him short. Abraham only negotiated God down to 10 righteous people. For 10 he would not destroy Sodom. And Abraham was ok with that. The dishonest manager is only concerned about this life. He goes around to various tenant farmers and “reconciles the accounts.” Bank error in your favor, collect $200 dollars. And why does he get away with this? Because he’s betting on the nature of the Rich man. I’ve done this on a smaller scale the entire time and he hasn’t done anything. The only reason I’m in trouble now is because someone got jealous and told him. And he has to have some honor. He has to call me to account. But I’m going to make a bet that what will sustain me for the rest of this life, is nothing to him.

“And the master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.”

But if all you are after is this life, you’ve sold him short. Because Jesus has taken eternal life from the Father. And Jesus has given that to you. You, how much do you owe? Quickly write that account to zero. Bet on the eternal love of the Father. “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails – and it will fail, this world does end – you may be received into eternal dwellings.” Jesus wrote all our accounts with the Father to zero. And the Father laughed and commended him. “This is my beloved Son, listen to him.”

**Moral/Eschatological**

IF you want to serve this world. If you want to work according to the law. You can. Just understand how little you are working with. And the sons of the world are shrewder than the sons of light.

Or you can lean into the love of the Father. The Father who has already set your account to zero. The Father who wants to give you the Kingdom, an eternal one. The Father who wants to give you something of your own that nothing can take away.

You can’t serve both masters – God and the world.

I’d encourage you to bet on the love of the Father. That’s what Jesus came to show us. The Love that is always ours. No bad backs or begging needed. Only faith. You account with God has been settled. Accept the gift and move into eternal dwellings.