

Sermon for Sunday, September 18, 2016

ENSURE YOUR FUTURE

It's clear from scripture that Jesus believed that there was more to life than what we see, know, and experience in this world. It's also clear that Jesus believed that God was in the process of transforming the world we know, through faith, into the kingdom of heaven, into a more blessed realm of faith, hope, and love, and that God invites us to join his beloved son in making that happen. It's also clear that Jesus believed in eternal life, a life lived in communion with God forever, that we have a future beyond the grave about which we should be concerned.

Now if you believe what Jesus believed, then Jesus' parable about a dishonest manager speaks to you. If you don't, it doesn't. In other words if you believe, as Jesus did, that God is your judge, albeit a loving one, and that one day you will meet God face to face and feel compelled to account for the manner in which you lived your life, for the manner in which you expressed your faith in God, for the false gods you worshiped and glorified, and for your stewardship of God's good gifts, then listen up. If you don't, then Jesus is wasting his breath because his message is falling on deaf ears. Interestingly, one of our Lord's frequent expressions at the end of parables was, "Let those who have ears to hear, hear."

Let me put this even more bluntly. If you think your life ends with your death, then just tune out for the next ten minutes. If you think, hope, and pray that your life continues beyond your death, then listen up, because Jesus is telling you to ensure your future.

Jesus, with insider information, tells you that the reign of God is coming, at an hour even he can't predict. He forecasts that God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, will ask you to account for your stewardship of his resources. God will want to know how you've cared for his children, for his creation, for his son, for his words, and how you've invested the talents he gave you for the building up of the community of faith and for the establishment of a world of peace and justice. In response, do you act quickly and decisively to save yourself? Do you invest yourself wholeheartedly and urgently in a relationship with Jesus Christ, studying the scriptures, praying without ceasing, worshipping faithfully, giving generously, and feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and clothing the naked as God commanded us to do? Of course not. Because when it comes to matters of faith, we are not very shrewd. We don't acknowledge that there is a crisis in our future, or that our current actions have much bearing on it. And as a result, we stand to lose it all.

A dishonest manager is summoned by the owner of the company to account for his sloppy and wasteful stewardship of the owner's resources. He knows that tomorrow he will get his pink slip. How will he ensure his future? He can't dig, and he is too ashamed to beg. His ability to make a living by earning a wage is compromised. He will have no income. What he needs are some friends who will take him in! So he goes out and settles his owner's accounts by offering incredible discounts on their indebtedness. It works like a charm. He has friends galore who are grateful to him.

The owner, when he finds out what the manager has done, still fires him, but commends him for acting shrewdly to ensure his future.

Jesus concludes the story by observing, that the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their generation, than are the children of light.

Jesus is telling us, his disciples, the children of light, that how we live right now has consequences for God's reign and for the security of our future. Although the words "Follow Me" don't pack the same punch as "You're Fired," still there is a similar urgency to them which invites a life-changing response.¹ Jesus said, "The time is at hand." His presence places us in crisis because he calls us to discipleship, and we have to give an answer. To remain silent is still an answer—the answer no. But to answer yes is to acknowledge that how we live, how we spend our time, how we use our money, what values we hold, and what relationships we form, have repercussions for God's future. The shrewd person responds to Christ's call, by acting quickly and decisively to make whatever changes are necessary to align him or herself with the kingdom that is coming.

Our Christian understanding of time and history is that we are living in the between times, in that time and space where the sphere of the old eon and the sphere of the new eon intersect one another. The MasterCard logo of two overlapping circles, pictures this perfectly, and I don't think it's an accident that it is called the MasterCard. The reign of God is upon us, and making its way inexorably into the old eon, replacing it by transforming it through faith. Jesus invites us to live into the new eon, to recognize that the old is passing away and the new is arriving in God's good time. He encourages us to recognize the signs of the times, to understand what is coming, and to adapt ourselves to it, not casually but with a sense of urgency and zeal, because our future is at stake.

This is not a matter of earning our way into heaven or even of saving our skin. Our reconciliation to God is still a matter of grace secured for us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No this is a matter of wisdom and foresight. God's future is coming whether we choose to participate in it or not. The question for us is more fundamental: Shall we move with the current of God's will, or drift into the stagnant eddies of our culture? Will we be children of this world, or children of light?

We know the kind of zeal we can demonstrate when we are in pursuit of income. We work hard, and we work late. We study our profession until we have mastered it. We allow ourselves few vacations. Set backs do not discourage us, but instead spur us to greater effort. We are undaunted in the pursuit of the good life.

We know the kind of commitment we can demonstrate when we find something we love, like golf. We play often, despite the expense. We practice regularly at the driving range. We study our swing, take lessons, and buy the latest clubs. We commit ourselves to mastering the sport.

Jesus suggests that we put the same kind of zeal and commitment into following him and preparing ourselves for the future God has in store for us.

We know how good we are at facing facts, and taking care of practical matters. If our bank account is low, we curb our spending. If our stock is declining, we sell it.

Jesus suggests that the most practical matter of all is our commitment to God's cause, and facing the facts of God's reign and our deaths. Yet we tend to ignore those facts and the practicality of discipleship with impunity. Yet our impunity does not alter the facts. The shrewd person is astute in practical matters.

We know how capable we are of looking ahead and preparing for the future. We have pension funds, tax-sheltered annuities, and retirement accounts. We have long-term care insurance, trust funds, and college education funds. When it comes to money, we have great foresight. We see the needs before they arrive, and prepare for them.

¹ Jennifer E. Copeland, *The Christian Century*, September 7, 2004, p. 21.

Jesus wants us to ensure our future in eternal life. Look ahead, see what's coming, and prepare yourselves. Trust in God's promises, hope in God's grace, have faith in God's purposes. These are resources that are inexhaustible and which will serve you unto eternal life. Wealth is dishonest, not because it is ill-gained, and not because it isn't valuable, but because it doesn't last. It is a false god. The riches that are eternal are faith, hope, and love. The shrewd investor amongst the children of light banks on those.

I can, with a good deal of confidence, make a prediction. On a day when you do not expect it, God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, will ask you to account for your stewardship of his resources. God will not ask you how much is in your savings account or in your investment portfolio. God will want to know how you've cared for his children, for his creation, for his son, for his words, and how you've invested the talents he gave you for the building up of the community of faith and for the establishment of a world of peace and justice. If you want to act quickly and decisively to ensure your future, invest yourself wholeheartedly and urgently in a relationship with Jesus Christ, studying the scriptures, praying without ceasing, worshipping faithfully, giving generously, and feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and clothing the naked as God commanded us to do. I promise you, it will be a shrewd move.

PRAYER: Gracious and loving God, may we, by the power of your Holy Spirit at work in us, be as shrewd about our spiritual future, as we are about our financial future. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask it. Amen.

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Luke 16:1-13